

*Streams
of
William James*

*The Newsletter of William James Society
Volume 3 • Issue 2 • Summer 2001*



*Includes 2000-1 Essay
Contest Winners*

Streams of William James

The Newsletter of William James Society
Volume 3 • Issue 2 • Summer 2001

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www.pragmatism.org/societies/william_james.htm



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—Article I,
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Published by the Philosophy Department • 308 Hanner Hall •
 Oklahoma State University • Stillwater, OK 74078-5064 • USA

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Surmounting “Rationalism and Associationism” Controversies

by Renato R. Kinouchi

When I first attended classes about William James, my view of a scientific psychology changed completely. Before those days, I used to imagine myself as a sober experimental researcher, despite the dissatisfaction of the rats under my ‘shocking’ experiments. But just as I got to know James’s viewpoint, I perceived how much good science could be made outside the laboratory contingencies. Ever since, I have left the rats in peace.

In Brazil, students of William James are extremely rare. To my knowledge, only our department¹ offers regular courses about him. Consequently, it is hard to meet people to talk about James’s ideas. In order to bypass this problem, I chose my older brother, Dr. Osame Kinouchi, a physicist who specializes in neural modeling. Osame had never read James in original texts; he functioned as a ‘naïve subject’ with whom I could discuss and check my own interpretations. What had called my attention was the Jamesian use of quite physical terms such as the plasticity of brain matter, the unstable equilibrium of the neural activity, and the dynamic properties of the stream of thought. So I asked him to read *The Principles of Psychology* chapters on “Habit,” “Automaton Theory,” and “Stream of Thought,” because I wanted to listen to what a modern specialist had to say about this ‘old-fashioned’ psychology—as most of experimental researchers seem to see James’s psychological masterpiece. Osame’s answer was the following:

James’s analogy of the stream of thought with a turbulent fluid flux is not an old-fashioned idea but a very fortunate one, from the physicist’s point of view. Indeed, although the local laws for fluid movement are well known, its strong non-linearities preclude a global understanding of the complex behavior of fluids. Pattern formation such as stable vortices and other structures are ill comprehended, and the origin of turbulence is one of the greatest challenges to 21st century physics. James’s intention, with his diverse physical analogies of complex systems, is to recover the richness of the thought flux from simplistic models based on ego-centered (CPU²) manipulation of atomic, isolated, and atemporal symbols; a perspective which even today informs most of cognitive science.

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In other words, for James, memories and thoughts reflect rich spatio-temporal patterns which cannot be isolated from an underlying neural activity flux, as vortices cannot be isolated from the river flux which gives origin to them. His emphasis on bounded but non-recurring activity (a chaotic attractor behavior in modern parlance) is surprisingly contemporaneous.³

During the last decade some researchers have begun to understand the neural activity as a flux realized by nonlinear dynamical processes in a complex system.⁴ An example of “non-linear dynamic process in a complex system” is the weather. It is composed of countless relations among variables, and it has “emergent” properties which cannot be quite determined—we know that patterns exist, but we cannot predict them with complete safety⁵. From a historical perspective, complex systems were first scientifically studied by “the great” (in James’s opinion)⁶ Henri Poincaré (1854-1912). But his researches on ‘deterministic chaos’ were aborted, because the difficulties of calculation were too much for everyone. Nowadays, it is known that chaotic events are radical examples of unpredictable behavior in a complex system. However, the most interesting questions arise when we have gradations of it (neither completely chaotic, nor completely determined).

Several contemporary researchers have found such phenomena in the brain functioning. Thus, in order to study this, it is indispensable to be a multi-disciplinary effort from physicists, chemists, neuro-biologists, psychologists, philosophers, and anyone interested in facing the difficulties of several complex interactions. Among such authors are Walter Freeman⁷, Andy Clark⁸, Tim van Gelder⁹, and Thelen & Smith¹⁰. Although their respective works have not met

². The Central Processor Unit (CPU) is the core of a digital computer. It receives inputs from the keyboard, the mouse, the drives, etc. The CPU processes this data serially, following logical rules to provide adequate outputs to the monitor, the speakers, etc. In short, CPU realizes the computer’s programs.

³. Kinouchi, O. (2000). *Dreams and Daydreams in Neural Networks: Reevaluating the Crick-Mitchison Unlearning Hypothesis*. Unpublished Draft.

⁴. See <http://www.societyforchaostheory.org> for a good number of links and further information.

⁵. See <http://oips.aip.org/chaos.jsp>. In this site we can learn that: “It is perhaps most convincing to clarify the impact of these paradigms by presenting examples of their interdisciplinary relevance. The same type of “deterministic chaos” can be observed, for example, in electrical activity from biological systems, in the transition of a fluid to turbulent motion, and in the motion of the moons of the giants planets.”

⁶. James, W. (1975/1978). *The Meaning of Truth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 210.

⁷. Freeman, W. (1999). *How Brains Make Up Their Minds*. London: Phoenix.

an explicit synthesis yet, in my opinion, they all sound somewhat Jamesian. For example, Freeman (1999) affirms the following words:

My conclusion comes to rest on a premise proposed by the psychologist William James in 1879, that consciousness is interactive with brain processes, and is neither epiphenomenal nor identical with those processes. Consciousness does not control behavioural actions, at least directly. In terms of dynamics it is an operator, because it modulates the brain dynamics from which past actions sprang. Residing nowhere and everywhere, it reworks the contents that are provided by the parts (p. 14).

In another passage, he quotes James's arguments for the causal efficacy of the consciousness on related neural processes:

This reminds me of something James wrote in 1879, when he was wrestling with the implications of Darwinian natural selection for brain function. In an article entitled 'Are we automata?' he asked whether consciousness might have a functional role that would endow its possessor with competitive edge. The opposing view was that consciousness is an epiphenomenon by which we might know God and feel pleasure or pain, but without affecting the activities of the neurons producing it. James concluded that consciousness is an 'organ added for the sake of steering a nervous system grown too complex to regulate itself.' But it is not an organ in the sense of some part of a brain, such as the frontal lobe, the amygdala, or the midbrain reticular formation, or a nucleus in the brainstem. It is a higher level of self-organization (p.186).

Perhaps one could agree about the similarity between William James's ideas and the modern dynamical approach. But a more critical reader might say: "Well... and where could one not find Jamesian influences? It is trivial that James's legacy has been permeating many fields of the contemporaneous science and philosophy. But, unfortunately, some fast thinkers usually take unsuitably the authority of James to defend all sorts of cheap novelty."

If we stop the argument now, the critic might have reason. As yet we have used a 'positive stratagem' to show the dynamicist reevaluation of Jamesian psychological findings. After a fashion, we have been follow-

ing a 'believing-truth-way' and we do not have any decisive evidence for it. Therefore, as James already had warned¹¹, in this path we are subjected to mistakes. Nevertheless, our knowledge also shall be improved by another manner, which can be safely applied on scientific tasks: the path of the exclusion of sources of mistake. Following the latter, which was frequently used by James in his scientific criticism over several theories, we are able to work under estimated risks. Accordingly we must compare what both James and dynamicists exclude from their respective approaches. If these 'excluded presuppositions' resemble each other, then we will have another piece of encouraging evidence, even though not yet decisive.

In the following paragraphs, I will try to show that, even taking the 'shunting-errors-way,' James and the dynamicists seek to avoid similar mistakes. When we look at the matter from this side, we can clearly perceive that both above-mentioned perspectives deny two fundamental errors: 1) to take consciousness as dual, logical, discrete, representational, center-commanded phenomena (Rationalism); and 2) to integrate atomic parts linked by the ordinary laws of the association (Associationism). Rationalism and Associationism definitely did make use of modern computational advances, and they already gave their well-known fruits to cognitive science: Artificial Intelligence and Connectionism, respectively. But now it is time to outdo them, as James once did for their 'older sisters'. In the forefront of cognitive science, it is the dynamical hypothesis that appears as a third alternative. Dynamical researchers take the brain neither as logical machine like a digital computer (Artificial Intelligence) nor as a mere associative machine like a neural network (Connectionism), but as a physiological complex system able to regulate its own activity. Thus, Jamesians could collaborate with dynamicists because both of them agree on many points, and also because Jamesians and dynamicists denounce those mistakes. It seems to me that James's words "we needn't pretend that we have the science already; but we can cheer those on who are working for its future, and clear metaphysical entanglements from their path"¹² remain valid in the contemporary cognitive science context.

The following is a brief analysis on computational metaphors in cognitive science.

⁸ Clark, A. (1997). "The Dynamical Challenge." *Cognitive Science*, vol. 21 (4), pp. 461-481.

⁹ Van Gelder, T. (1998). "The Dynamical Hypothesis." *Behavioral and Brain Science*, 21:5.

¹⁰ Thelen, E. & Smith, L. B. (1994). *A Dynamic System Approach to Development of Cognition and Action*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

¹¹ James, W. (1992). *The Will to Believe*. In: *William James Writings 1878-1899*. New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, pp. 457-479.

¹² James, W. (1983). *A Plea for Psychology as a 'Natural Science'*. In: *The Works of William James*, F. H. Burkhardt (Editor). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 276-277.

Alan Turing's conceptions about computational processing came from mathematical ground. His work became one of the most influential theories in cognitive science. In the cultural context 'Artificial Intelligence' undoubtedly inspired a great deal of science fiction stories¹³. But it was in the philosophical ground where the deepest changes occurred, because it led several thinkers into investigating seriously the possible similarities between computational operations and human thought.

The hardware/software distinction was able to deal with the persistent dualism inherited from Descartes. In brief words, brains were viewed as the material substrata (hardware) which could run our cognitive procedures (softwares). For Artificial Intelligence all cognitive functions could be described in this way: human representations are discrete symbols, which can be manipulated through finite operations (algorithms), also being necessary to postulate one central agency able to do those operations (a kind of Central Processor Unit—CPU). In short, human thought is information processing. Moreover, this perspective was based on logical principles, which satisfied the desires for a rational explanation. The simplicity of these arguments, and the 'practical results' of them seduced many people.

James's view about human thought practically antagonizes the above-mentioned suppositions. Arguments against dualism of substance can be found in "Does Consciousness Exist?"¹⁴ In *The Principles of Psychology*¹⁵ he also contests the manipulation of discrete representations in "the stream of thought." As for the necessity of a 'processing agency,' James criticizes the Intellectualist point of view which defends that: "The relations must be known, they say, in something that is no feeling, no mental modification continuous and consubstantial with the subjective tissue out of which sensations and other substantive states are made" (p. 238). In fact, the CPU is not 'continuous and consubstantial' with the symbols manipulated by CPU itself, because CPU works like an 'ego' which knows the relations between inputs and outputs. Finally, his naturalism bases the formal logic on the psychological function of comparison. In particular, see the "Necessary Truths and the Effects of Experience" chapter.

¹³The existential crisis of the supercomputer Hall can still cause shivers in a lot of spectators from Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of *2001 – A Space Odyssey* by Arthur C. Clarke.

¹⁴James, W. (1976). *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. In *The Works of William James*, F. H. Burkhardt (Editor). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹⁵James, W. (1890/1983). *The Principles of Psychology*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

A second boom in computational ground was brought by developments of neural networks. The basis of this boom was established by Rosenblatt's Perceptron in 1962, but not until the 1980s did this perspective strongly flourish. Neural networks helped researchers to mitigate temporal constraints of serial processing (some complex tasks take too many computational steps, and it often exceeds our practical time scale). The aim was to distribute the work among several parallel processors interconnected to each other, which could improve the total system speed. Besides, these networks showed some very interesting properties. The networks show plasticity because the strengths between their connections can be changed as a function of the feedback. They are therefore able to learn by 'experience,' extracting inductive rules from one set of examples. Finally, their 'representations' are distributed over a whole system, providing a perspective less centered on the software/hardware distinction, since memory and internal displaying are mixed together. What the networks 'know' are their own associative states. As in many other areas, William James has been co-opted as the pioneer of connectionism. In a handbook that is well thought of within the connectionist circle, Anderson's 1997 *An Introduction to Neural Networks*¹⁶ affirms:

James has a mechanistic and quite clear description of biological association based on discharges and tendencies, with a conjunctive learning rule that looks very much like the architecture of modern neural models for cognition. The model qualifies him, in my mind at least, for the title, first neural modeler or first connectionist, depending on the reader's preference (p. 148).

In fact, in this book, Anderson quotes William James more than any other thinker. There are eight literal quotations and three of James's original figures. But there is a lack of detail in Anderson's book that may disappoint attentive readers. Except for one, all of these quotations come from the "Association" chapter in *Psychology, The Briefer Course*. It is evident that, quoting only passages from "Association" without at least one reference to the "Discrimination" chapter, anyone is prone to distort the Jamesian approach. In my opinion, Anderson misunderstands James's ideas because he takes James as an associationist. But, indeed, James (1890/1983) had already alerted people that human thought does both operations, association and discrimination, "much as, in walking, a man's two

¹⁶Anderson, J. A. (1997). *An Introduction to Neural Networks*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/Bradford Books.

legs are alternately brought into use, both being indispensable for any orderly advance" (p. 519). Possibly, the persistence of this connectionist researcher into taking just James's writings about associative processing¹⁷ indirectly might connote how much Connectionism is, itself, a kind of modern 'Associationism'¹⁸. Moreover, it is worthwhile noting that James denounces a similar mistake done by Locke's descendants, who had insisted on an 'associationist' interpretation of their master's words¹⁹.

Conclusions

In cognitive science there is an incipient reevaluation of William James's legacy. But Jamesians need to be aware of some misunderstandings which modern researchers may make about him. In my opinion, the dynamical approach is on the right track, mainly because it tries to avoid both the Rationalism (Artificial Intelligence) and Associationism (Connectionism). Of course we cannot deny that these two latter approaches have done much for our technological

advance. Nowadays, who does research without using, at least, text editor software? But Artificial Intelligence and Connectionism—taken as supposed metaphors of the human thought—should be surmounted. And James could collaborate in this task, inspiring researchers and particularly students with his heartening company.

Finally, there is another interesting point. There are several discussions about the limitations of the language for the scientific explanation of psychological phenomena, but almost nothing is said about how much a great writer can minimize such limitations. Supposing that James's perspective and the dynamical approach are truly similar, then the extraordinary descriptive capacity of William James could help to 'translate' the dynamical specialized parlance into a more readable and universal form. In other words, a kind of 'comparative study' between James and dynamical hypotheses could both improve our knowledge of dynamic systems as well as enlarge appreciation of James's achievements and fellowship. This is what happened in the case of the present work, which grew out of the exchange of ideas between a psychologist and a physicist.

¹⁷Note that Anderson takes James's ideas as a "description of biological association".

¹⁸Fodor & Pylyshyn (1988). "Connectionism and Cognitive Architecture: A Critical Analysis." In S. Pinker and J. Mehler (eds), *Connections and Symbols*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/Bradford Books, pp. 3-71.

¹⁹See the beginning of the "Discrimination and Comparison" chapter in the *Principles*.

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WJ: Quantum Mystic

by Dale A. Hildebrandt

In the beginning of this new millennium, we as a people are beginning, more and more, to develop a “quantum sense” of things. That is, we are just beginning to shift from the old paradigm of “Aristotelian Logic,” “Either/Or,” and Binary Thinking; as well as from the old paradigm which says things are objective. The paradigm that is beginning to emerge, and will one day be the new paradigm getting ready to be replaced, is one of “Quantum Thought.” In Quantum Thought we realize that by perceiving something we influence that which we perceive; by thinking about something we influence that which we think about. We are entering into the fields of Non-Local Reality and other exciting frontiers. However, while this seems to be a new paradigm, in reality it is an old paradigm rebirthed. The Taoists, Zen Monks, Gnostic Christians, Neurosemanticists, Shamans, Magickians, and “fringe” and not so fringe (for example, Bohr) scientists have throughout the ages promoted this Quantum Thinking; whether they call it “No Mind” or “Non-Local Reality” or “The Abyss”—they all mean the same thing in a general sense. One great thinker who promoted such ideas through his works was William James. The work I will be referring to here is specifically from *Talks To Teachers on Psychology* by William James, “Chapter 2: The Stream of Consciousness,” referenced from <http://www.emory.edu/EDUCATION/mfp/tt2.html>. In this chapter James talks about a “stream of consciousness.”

James first informs us that “some kind of consciousness is always going on.” The ideas, theories, techniques, and concepts of Quantum Psychology, Post-Modernists, the Human Potential Movement, Taoists, The Golden Dawn Society, Neurolinguistic Programmers, Shamans, Humanistic Psychologists, Transpersonal Psychologists, Hypnotherapists, and other various factions would quite readily agree with this concept. This idea of consciousness going on at all times gives one the impression that consciousness is a Non-Local Entity; that consciousness resides in the MIND, not in the BRAIN. Here, when talking about the brain, what is meant is the actual physical structure that one can see with PET or MRI scans.

What is meant by Mind is a concept of a holographic non-local entity. In other words, consciousness is always going on because we are always connected to the Mind through the brain. There have been volumes upon volumes of books that either are entirely devoted to, or have a chapter about, using the time of sleep to achieve or solve problems. Experiential as well as experimental results have shown that the techniques often work. This informs us that during sleep we are having “some kind of consciousness... going on.” With the recent developments in brain wave measurements, and

various other technological advances, we now know that consciousness is *always* going on, whether we are aware of it or not. James begins to tie his theory into knots of a Binary Thought System (a system where you must choose one or the other, i.e. All Cats are Black or All Cats are Gray). However, later on, James unties these knots.

The Binary Thought System that James falls into is saying that we have an analytic level of description and we have an explanatory level of description. He then goes on to say he will not deal with the explanatory level. This may seem as if he has fallen into a Binary Mode, but later on in the paper we find that James will not put things into neat little boxes for us, but rather let us put them in the boxes that we want. This unties the knot of the Binary Thought System, allowing James to freely explore the analytical level. This also harkens us to Quantum Thinking, where what we perceive affects what we are perceiving. If we explain this stream of consciousness, then we are, in effect, affecting the stream of consciousness. This leads us into what is called a Semantic Bind to linguists or a Double Bind to hypnotherapists; it is also known as a Repeat Loop to computer programmers and a Strange Loop to logicians. If we must explain the stream of consciousness but affect the stream of consciousness while explaining it, we must again explain this stream, and this repeats over and over. Whether James realized this or not, and he did on some level, we believe, he began the foundation for a Quantum Reality. James also tells us that we really have no idea where or how this stream of consciousness comes from, although many have speculated. James tells us that the state of our brain affects our stream of consciousness, which again brings him into Quantum territory.

How the brain conditions these streams is another problem in itself. James also says that if we attribute this to a higher being or label it as Soul, we will have “familiar enough terms,” but we will have little in way of explanation. In this, one could take away the meaning that James is against the idea of Soul or Spirit or any of those other ideas. However, the statement which James makes actually puts himself into the category of Mystic, Zen Master, or whatever label the reader may find appropriate. James talks about “familiar enough terms,” meaning that the terms are familiar, the words are familiar... perhaps even soothing... but they do little in the way of actually explaining things. James refusing to talk about the explanatory level shows us just how much of a true Quantum Mystic he was at this time. If you ask a Zen Master to explain Zen you might get a laugh from him. If you ask a Taoist Priest to explain Tao, you might get told “The road you walk upon is not the road you talk about” (*Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu). If you ask a person who has studied the work of Korzybski and became a Neurosemantic Programmer to explain streams of consciousness to you, you may get the answer “The

map you read is not the territory you tread.” Alan Watts informed us that “The menu item you read isn’t the food you eat.” So here we have William James telling us that the Spirit may be an explanation, but it doesn’t really tell us “the how of things.” James refusing to describe the “how of things” allows people to speculate on the how by themselves, to find their own meanings and draw their own conclusions, to do their own experiments or experiential tests. James referring to the Soul as a familiar term gives us a deep insight. James tells us that the word “Soul” is familiar, but that it does not explain “how.” In neurolinguistic programming (NLP), hypnosis, and other various disciplines, one learns that a word like “Soul” is a nominalization. “If you can’t put it in a wheelbarrow, then it’s a nominalization” (Richard Bandler). Almost any time a nominalization is used, the person hearing it will form their own association towards that term. For example, if one were to talk about “Great Connections,” it would be a vague term and the listener would associate it to a past experience. However, this process of associating a nominalization to a past experience doesn’t tell us the “how” of their stream of consciousness. In fact, in the disciplines of NLP, neurosemantics, chaos magick, and other disciplines, there is no regard, no caring about, the “how,” as long as the thing being explored works. The concepts of James work. Reading the paper of James that we have referenced will show James demonstrating these concepts working in action. There is no care about how our lights turn on when we flip the light switch. When the light switch doesn’t turn on the lights, we also don’t care how it works; what we do is demand that it be fixed. On this level we have James as a sort of Quantum Mystic, a man before his time. He refuses to explain “how” but will tell you what works. James gives us “mere description.” However, “mere description” is not as easy as it sounds. Zen practitioners, Yoga followers, various meditators, and others can spend their entire lives revealing to themselves the description. The “mere description” is more than “mere;” it is an art form and an advancement of the paradigm of Quantum Thought. Fields of consciousness tie in very well with this theme. James tells us that there are two facts:

1. we have “fields of consciousness” and
2. These concrete fields are always complex.

Here we are getting into Zen Awareness or the new paradigm that is starting to shift its way into society: Quantum Thinking. James informs us that these fields have everything in them. These fields have our bodily perceptions, our thoughts, our emotions, and among these they have every sensation, every perception, every thought, every emotion. However, at certain times the field is polarized more towards one thing, yet still having the other things in the field of consciousness. When we look at this in simpler terms, we can say that,

for example, right now you are reading an essay. Let’s take an example that you are reading this essay and thinking about this essay. Your field of consciousness has more “energy” or “has a focus” directed towards this essay, at this time, than towards a bill you have to pay, an angry thought about your boss, or a romantic emotion for your lover. However, after mentioning these things, we have actually transferred, or altered, the “energy” or “focus” from the reading of this essay to the aforementioned things.

Another example is that you are reading this essay, but you are probably not aware of the sensation of your ears. You probably aren’t paying attention to your breathing. You probably aren’t thinking about breakfast or what your left hand feels like. Shifting the focus of this field of consciousness is an easy task to learn. Explaining the “how” behind it is like answering a koan. Thusly, we have proven to you that James was right, you have a “field of consciousness” and it is “always complex.” You are always breathing, for example, but you don’t focus your “consciousness” on this task unless someone shifts that focus. The “field of consciousness” includes body sensations, emotions, thoughts, and many other things. However, we tend to focus on about three at the most. The complexity of these fields is intriguing and again brings us to the subject of Quantum Theory and Quantum Thought. If we aren’t paying attention to how we are breathing, and our breathing somehow affects the results of an experiment, then is the experiment valid? It is a gracious world indeed that lets us focus attention on only a few things in our “field of consciousness.” There are extreme examples of people who can’t focus; people with attention deficit disorder (ADHD) and people with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) are examples. The ADHD person has trouble focusing his “field of consciousness” and wants to do forty things and wants to do them all right this moment. If their attention is focused properly, they can be helped. In the case of a person with OCD, we see an example of a person who is too focused on only one field of consciousness. They must wash their hands thirty-seven times before eating or they must lock and unlock a door ten times to make sure its safe. By allowing a person with OCD to learn how to focus on other parts of their consciousness they can be helped. James’s work was truly ahead of its time and is quite appropriate for today’s, and tomorrow’s, world. This leads us from “focusing” to “margins.”

While we write this, there are six lights in the room, five bookshelves, a tower hard-drive, too many tiles for me to count, a television, a radio, a bulletin board, the keyboard that is being typed on, a bottle of water. There are literally thousands of things. However, until mentioned, they remain in the “margin.” You are reading an essay. The paper is white. The text is black. This is written in English. When something is noticed in a margin it is focused on, maybe for only a split second, but the

WJ: Quantum Mystic by Dale A. Hildebrandt

focus shifts. This idea of “margins” and “focus” within our field of consciousness is an evolutionary step towards making psychology, society, and modern man better in all senses. When one loses one’s temper, for example, one puts all the good things about one’s self in the “margin” of consciousness. When people talk negatively, they put positive thoughts in the “margin” of the field. If you can interrupt the process of this negative talk, and bring a positive memory or positive talk from the margin into the focus of the field, you will see not only an emotional change, but in many cases a physiological change (*Unlimited Power* by Anthony Robbins). Thusly, James was a pioneer of thought. Quantum Thinking would make sure that we check what we are focusing on and what we have in our margins. James talks about changing focal objects and marginal objects in his paper and how the results vary. However, when done in the proper context, shifting the right way can make a great impact on an individual or even a society.

The example of shifting from Aristotelian Logic to Quantum Thinking, this paradigm shift, is itself a change of focus and margin. The Quantum Theory has come out of the margin and been increased little by little, while little by little Binary Thinking is entering into the margin. The fields of consciousness have a sort of

“flux” to them, and they are on a continuum. Some people will remain focused on Newtonian Physics, others will remain focused on Quantum Physics. When enough people are focused on Quantum Physics, or Quantum Thinking, then the focal point of society and the individual will shift. In this regard, William James has left us a great work. His work exemplifies that changing the focal point or the marginal point or both (hence taking him out Binary Thinking) in different levels can cause different changes to occur. This system of thinking, which William James propagated, is a beneficial system, not only to mankind but to the individual who realizes and uses the impact this knowledge bestows. This system also puts William James into the new box that has been created, the box of Quantum Mystic. Our consciousness is neither here or there but both and yet none at the same time. This is a brilliant description of Quantum Thinking and of Mysticism and we owe it to William James.

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2 WJ 1860 Geneva Notebook Pages

WJ and Delacroix

"I remember his repeatedly laying his hand on Delacroix, whom he found always and everywhere interesting—to the point of trying effects, with charcoal and crayon, in his manner; and not less in the manner of Decamps, whom we regarded as more or less of a genius of the same rare family. They were touched with the ineffable, the inscrutable, and Delacroix in especial with the incalculable; categories these toward which we had even then, by a happy transition, began to yearn and languish."

—Henry James on William James from *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), p. 301
reprinted in *The Thought and Character of William James* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1996), p. 50.

Notes:

- Andrew Carrington Shelton wrote in his "Ingres versus Delacroix" article for *Art History, Journal of the Association of Art Historians*, Vol. 23, No. 5, Dec. 2000 (Oxford and Boston: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.), that Ingres has long been identified with "officially sanctioned and institutionally entrenched neoclassicism" while Delacroix represented "wilfully oppositional, irreverent and stridently non-conformist Romanticism" (p. 726).

- On a recent PBS TV nature show, the narrator casually mentioned how within every house cat lurks a lion.

—RHA

WJ on Lions

“A single complex instinctive action may involve successively the awakening of impulses of all three classes. Thus a hungry lion starts to *seek* prey by the awakening in him of imagination coupled with desire; he begins to *stalk* it when, on eye, ear, or nostril, he gets an impression of its presence at a certain distance; he springs upon it, either when the booty takes alarm and sees, or when the distance is sufficiently reduced; he proceeds to *tear* and *devour* it the moment he gets a sensation of its contact with his claws and fangs. Seeking, stalking, springing, and devouring are just so many different kinds of muscular contraction, and neither kind is called forth by the stimulus appropriate to the other.”

—*William James*, from the “Instinct” chapter, *The Principles of Psychology*. [1890]
(Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981/1983), p. 1006.

Lion Hunt by Ferdinand Victor Eugène Delacroix (1858)

given to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1895

Anxiety and Interpretation: Shaping the Experience of William James and Henry James Sr.

by Tadd Ruetenik

This essay explores the religious thought of Henry James Sr., its influence on the thought of his son William, and to a lesser extent its influence on William's younger brother, Henry Jr. Henry Sr. and William each derived his religious views from a profound psychological and moral crisis during his formative years, one that involved an unexplainable fear and a mysterious human figure. In addition, these experiences resulted in a challenge to notions of selfhood, and focused themselves on a maternal figure who is a potential solace. Henry Sr.'s and William's responses to the crisis determined the course of each one's moral development. In looking at the direction of this development, it is appropriate to begin with words from the father, presented here without context in order to represent the suddenness with which the experience it recounts occurred.

The Damned Shape

Henry Sr. writes:

One day ... towards the close of May, having eaten a comfortable dinner, I remained sitting at the table after the family had dispersed, idly gazing at the embers in the grate, thinking of nothing, and feeling only the exhilaration incident to a good digestion, when suddenly—in a lightning flash as it were—"fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake." To all appearance it was a perfectly insane and abject terror, without ostensible cause, and only to be accounted for, to my perplexed imagination, by some damned shape squatting invisible to me within the precincts of the room, and ray-ing out from his fetid personality influences fatal to life. The thing had not lasted ten seconds before I felt myself a wreck, that is, reduced from a state of firm, vigorous, joyful manhood to one of almost helpless infancy. The only self-control I was capable of exerting was to keep my seat. I felt the greatest desire to run incontinently to the foot of the stairs and shout for help to my wife—to run to the roadside even, and appeal to the public to protect me; but by an immense effort I controlled these frenzied impulses, and determined not to budge from my chair till I had recovered my lost self-possession. This purpose I held for a good long hour, as I reckoned time, beat upon meanwhile by an ever-growing tempest of doubt, anxiety and despair, with absolutely no relief from any truth I had ever encountered save a most pale and distant glimmer of the Divine existence ... (59-60).

As R. W. B. Lewis notes, this carefully-worded account, written only a few years before the man's death, is

the culmination of the father's biographical writings, and even perhaps his intellectual career. In his analysis of this very significant passage, Lewis says that the human shape projected by Henry Sr. as a locus of the panic may be considered "one part of James's self in the horrified intuition or apprehension (for it was 'invisible' to him) of ... what he really was: not the righteous, virtue-seeking family-loving man he had striven to be, but a nauseous, hateful, corrupted being that poisoned and destroyed everything he touched" (52). Following Lewis, we can add that this figure is, perhaps, the ghostly return of the self that Henry Sr. symbolically murdered in the moral decision-making of his early life. This is an image representative of William's more-or-less existentialist philosophy, in which one defines one's self through significant life decisions. But what's more, there are affinities to Henry Jr.: we see a precursor to the image used in "The Jolly Corner," where Brydon experiences the figure of a maimed apparition, whose identity with the protagonist seems to be recognized, but nonetheless explicitly denied by the principal characters. "And he isn't—no, he isn't—*you!*" affirms his confidant, who is then embraced by Brydon as if to consummate their complicit denial (525).

Henry Sr. also wants to sever himself from an apparitional figure. A vastation experience is one in which the subject experiences an outwardly projected, grotesque self, the presence of which is considered abject. Given this, we should look further into the descriptions. The author remarks that his panic hits after dinner, and he sees fit to note that his digestive repose was the condition for the experience. What's more, the invisible figure is one who squats in the room and seems to exude a 'fetid personality.' Perhaps Lewis is just being polite, but he seems to neglect making an important, albeit vulgar, connection regarding what he calls "the nature of the squatting horror" (52). Yet one cannot avoid noticing that ingestion and expulsion seem to be represented in the author's account. Henry Sr. had finished ingesting dinner, and was exhilarated with digestion, when the abject figure of expulsion appears, in the position suitable to that task. The visual image that accompanies his panic was that of 'embers in the grate.' At that moment, Henry Sr.'s consciousness was glowing ash, which is an apt symbol of that which occurs to food during digestion. The father's vastation experience is one in which he is being digested into spirit, with his body left behind as fetid waste. Rather than say 'projected,' we can, drawing on connotations involving 'casting away' and 'avoiding,' say that Henry Sr.'s body is *abjected* in the shape of this evil, earthly figure.¹

To understand how this experience, and the interpretation provided here, might fit into Henry Sr.'s thinking, one can draw attention to the often misunderstood meaning, in Christian philosophy, of 'living in the flesh.' As Kierkegaard explains in *Works of Love*, "by the sensuous,

1. The connection between the concept 'outcast' and 'abject' can be seen by an example. For example, the outcasts of Hindu culture are called the 'untouchables,' and it is not surprising that it is they who were given the task of cleaning up human waste.

the flesh, Christianity understands selfishness" (52). This is saying that, contrary to the popular spiritual understanding, it is not that sensual impulses are to be avoided simply because they are dirty and fetid. Rather, sensuous impulses are to be avoided because they are self-centered. After all, where else is one's consciousness of being a distinct self more prevalent than in pain and in sensuous pleasure? The distinction between the flesh and the spirit should not be vulgarized into a simple distinction between the clean and the dirty. Rather, the difference should be thought of more profoundly as that between selfishness and selflessness.

Accordingly, the body is also to be thought of in a different way. The body is not determined merely by a preset physical demarcation; it is, rather, determined by the extent of one's investment in the world. The supreme attitude of selflessness is represented in the supreme body of Christ, whose extension covers the earth; the supreme attitude of selfishness is represented in the private acts of humans. The natural bodily functions are of course not sinful, yet their necessity and their privacy make them particularly good symbols of humans' fundamental attitude of selfishness. For example, Jonathan Edwards, in his infamous "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" sermon, damns his congregation for the intolerable acts that they commit in their private moments, when they ought to be reading *The Bible*. There is a kind of a perverse tongue-in-cheek going on here, and the more enlightened of Edwards's parishioners were expected to understand it as talking about selfishness more than anything else. The purpose of that sermon was not simply to scare people into submission to the church. Edwards, after all, realized that his congregation was not so gullible as not to see through such a cheap political ploy. Rather, the purpose was to draw people's minds to their own selfish-centeredness by poignantly presenting them with the most concerned questions, namely that of whether they will subject themselves to the selfish Hell of their own making, or find their way through it. Edwards's words served, in short, the purpose of submitting his congregation to a baptism by fire, so that their selfish illusions would be stripped away. The self that gets terrified by such an illusion is disclosed as the false self, and is the one to get cast aside. Edwards's words served this purpose. For Henry Sr., it was a vision that made the point.

Henry Sr. likely understood the Calvinism of Edwards. After all, he did attend seminary at Princeton, the school at which Edwards was briefly to preside before his death. Henry Sr. dropped out of the school, of course, but he seems to have retained a pragmatic understanding of its doctrines. For him, a doctrine of the utter depravity of the individual would not be contrived simply to bully weak souls into churchly submission; it would be designed to depose the reign of selfhood. According to the traditional Christian soteriology, an individual's consciousness of sin is the first step toward its eradication; however, Henry Sr. goes further, saying that in order to eradicate sin, one must eradicate the individual. In *Spiritual Creation*, he asserts that "the only spiritual evil in fact is that which

attaches to man, and is known under the distinctive name of sin, because it is the only evil which belongs to a conscious or personal subject, that is, one who feels his life to be in himself" (265). All condemnation, he says, is ultimately self-condemnation.

In short, Henry Sr. took the concept of Christian selflessness very seriously. He says quite straightforwardly that "the establishment of the divine kingdom on earth will only take place in so far as men can be induced practically to give over esteeming their natural selfhood so highly, and consent to count it thenceforth as illusory." This is hardly conventional American Protestantism. He even goes on to say that humans "habitually live under the illusion that their natural selfhood is something divinely sacred, and no illusion is more profoundly inveterate in the long run than this" (270). Such an inveterate mindset requires a vastation experience to change it. Henry Sr.'s experience was profound enough that, when it subsided, it left him not only with disdain for selfishness, but also, it seems, disdain for humanness. Recovering from his trauma, he resolves that

The curse of mankind, that which keeps our manhood so little and so depraved, is its sense of selfhood, and the absurd, abominable opinionativeness it engenders. How sweet it would be to find oneself no longer man, but one of those innocent and ignorant sheep pasturing upon that placid hillside, and drinking in eternal dew and freshness from nature's lavish busom! (62)

This almost misanthropic lament is noteworthy not only because it shows the extent of Henry Sr.'s sentiments, but also because it is quite similar to the sentiments of John Bunyan, whose personal writings were important to William. Quoted in the *Varieties of Religious Experience*, the melancholic Bunyan says he'd rather be a dog or a toad than a damnable human: "I would many times look on the beasts with envy, wishing with all my heart I was in their place, that I might have no soul to lose," in consideration of which William concludes that "envy of the placid beasts seems to be a very widespread affection in this type of sadness" (VRE 178). William saw this misanthropic affection in his father, and so it is not surprising that he would talk about it in his writing. In fact, immediately after the quote from Bunyan, William presents the famous passage about his own melancholic struggle and his subsequent anxiety experience, as if he were in some way following up on Bunyan's, as well as his father's, view. It is to this experience that we will now turn.

That shape am I, potentially

William writes:

Whilst in this state of philosophic pessimism and general depression of spirits about my prospects, I went one evening into a dressing-room in the twilight to procure some article that was there; when suddenly there fell upon me without any warning, just as if it came out of the dark-

ness, a horrible fear of my own existence. Simultaneously there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum, a black haired youth with greenish skin, entirely idiotic, who used to sit all day on one of the benches, or rather shelves against the wall, with his knees drawn up against his chin, and the coarse gray undershirt, which was his only garment, drawn over them inclosing his entire figure. He sat there like a sort of sculptured Egyptian cat or Peruvian mummy, moving nothing but his black eyes and looking absolutely non-human. This image and my fear entered into a species of combination with each other. *That shape am I*, I felt, potentially. Nothing that I possess can defend me against that fate, if the hour for it should strike for me as it struck for him. There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was as if something hitherto solid within my breast gave way entirely, and I became a mass of quivering fear. After this the universe was changed for me altogether. I awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach, and with a sense of the insecurity of life that I never knew before, and that I have never felt since. It was like a revelation; and although the immediate feelings passed away, the experience has made me sympathetic with the morbid feelings of others ever since. It gradually faded, but for months I was unable to go out into the dark alone. (VRE 179-180)

William's panic struck with a horrible fear of his own existence. This is a peculiar phrase. If William had said that he fears *for* his own existence, one might understand this simply as an example of self-preservation. Yet there is something more to this experience than an animal instinct. William is overwhelmed by the realization *that he exists*. One can understand this by referring to the father, who writes about the difference between living and existing. Noting his departure from conventional theology, Henry Sr. says that

The conservative idea, for example, is that our selfhood or felt freedom constitutes our true *life*, our inseparable *being*, the soul veritable life or being we derive from God; whereas I maintain on the contrary that it does no such thing: that it constitutes at most our finite or conscious *existence*,—that is, the mere *quasi* life, the mere *phenomenal* or apparitional being we derive from an altogether unconscious natural community or fellowship which we are under with respect to our kind. (202)

According to Henry Sr.'s view, the fear of existence means the fear of living as a self apart from a community. Perhaps this is what William is afraid of, despite his tough-minded avowal of individuality. Perhaps William, deep-down, is really a tender-minded soul who takes seriously the desire for support from his fellows, who desires, in moments of crisis, to do precisely as his father wishes to do, and run and flail his arms at passersby on the street, who might help free him from his lonely insanity.

The significance of the mysterious shapes is worth

exploring further. William's figure was based on a publicly verifiable object. In his vision, though, it is simply a gray shape splotched with black, a roughly sketched portrait that has yet to be crafted into human likeness. Or perhaps what William sees is a sculpture in progress. The point is that William fears he cannot quite distinguish himself from the figure, which indicates that he realizes his own self is grounded in faceless matter. In the figure, William sees existence. On the other hand, Henry Sr.'s figure was invisible and private. The father's fetid humanoid was actively radiating evil, whereas the son's roughly sculpted mass was relatively inert. Henry Sr.'s perceived figure, moreover, was presumably free to leave the confines of the room if he pleased, which contrasts with the situation of the perceiver, who will not leave his chair. The figure that William experiences, however, was confined interminably, whereas its perceiver was free to leave as he pleased. This juxtaposition of freedom and confinement is worth further consideration.

Fear to the Brink of Gladness

Even prisons and sick-rooms have their special revelations.

Near the end of "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," William inserts the above statement about sick-rooms, amidst remarks concluding that each individual, from the "peculiar position in which he stands" (Pragmatism 285), is capable of observing a portion of truth. William's sick-room revelation—the vision wherein a gray figure of inhumanity broaches James's scientific security—provided some of this truth. Yet the above-quoted statement also alludes to other occasions for revelation, and to find the referent one need not go to cryptically cited testimonies from the *Varieties of Religious Experience*, but rather to an earlier point in "Blindness." William brings up the situation of Benvenuto Cellini, who, "after a life all in the outer sunshine, made of adventures and artistic excitements, suddenly finds himself cast into a dungeon in the Castle of San Angelo." The scene is described thus:

The place is horrible. Rats and wet and mould possess it. His leg is broken and his teeth fall out, apparently with scurvy. But his thoughts turn to God as they have never turned before. He gets a Bible, which he reads during the one hour in the twenty-four in which a wandering ray of daylight penetrates his cavern. He has religious visions. He sings psalms to himself, and composes hymns. And thinking, on the last day of July, of the festivities customary on the morrow in Rome, he says to himself: "All these past years I celebrated this holiday with the vanities of the world: from this year henceforward I will do it with the divinity of God. And then I said to myself, 'Oh, how much more happy I am for this present life of mine than for all those things remembered.'" (Pragmatism 280)

Because he was a doctor observing a room, William could excuse himself when he pleased. When the point of

view of the epileptic boy threatened to become his own, he could remove himself from the scene. The above passage, however, is written from the point of view of an imprisoned soul similar to the one James observed years earlier. Cellini, like the black-haired boy, sat incapacitated, waiting for light from the outside world to enter his existence. It is almost as if the silent figure that William observed years ago is given voice here. Rather than do nothing but wander his black eyes aimlessly, he was productive. His eyes, engaged rather than vacant, now move intelligently over the pages of *The Bible*. Through his thoughts, he is able to free himself, which is precisely what William, during the palpitating moments of his anxious experience, is unable to do.

William, it seems, was never able to work through his anxious moments to their blissful other side. He quotes copiously from the writings of those who seem to have done so, and his comments are brief and humble. Whitman's poetry bristles with a vital significance; Emerson's prose is motivated by an experience of being, as quoted by William, "glad to the brink of fear" (Pragmatism 281). William, however, never was exhilarated enough to see a world filled with such vitality. He had experiences of fear and despondency that never moved him into the kind of gladness that he witnesses in other authors. "To be imprisoned or shipwrecked or forced into the army would permanently show the good of life to many an over-educated pessimist," says William (Pragmatism 282), who seemingly longs to place himself in submission, and be carried by force into a greater understanding. But on the contrary, the fear that attended William's sick-room revelation did not push him through any threshold. It only gradually subsided, like a tidal torrent that slowly recedes back into stolid waters. His vastation imparted to his experience a new portion of truth, but he was incomplete. Contra Emerson, William's experience was one of fear to the brink of gladness, and indeed only to the brink. Writing with humility and admiration about the vastation of his father (a long-time friend of Emerson) William says that "the experience in question has always been an acute despair, passing over into an equally acute optimism, through a passion of renunciation of the self and surrender to the higher power" (VRE 72). It is clear that William wants to follow his father.

The Matriarchal Figure

One of the similarities between the accounts of the father and the son is that they both involved each man being very concerned with a significant female in their lives. The figure of the motionless gray man in the infirmary was so poignant for William because of its similarity to the figure of his sister, Alice, who suffered from an incapacitating illness unknown even to a family like the Jameses, who had the capacity for extraordinary psychological and medical insights. It is curious, however, that it is not Alice but rather William's mother who shows up as a security figure in her son's account, as if his concern for his mother were displacing any concern for his sister. For example, after describing the panic fear, William talks

about its dissipation:

In general I dreaded to be left alone. I remember wondering how other people could live, how I myself had ever lived, so unconscious of that pit of insecurity beneath the surface of life. My mother in particular, a very cheerful person, seemed to me a perfect paradox in her unconsciousness of danger, which you may well believe I was very careful not to disturb by revelations of my own state of mind. I have always thought that this experience of melancholia of mine had a religious bearing. (VRE 180)

As F. O. Matthiessen notes, Henry Jr.'s cursory descriptions of his mother eulogize her into "the sweetest, gentlest, most natural embodiment of maternity—our protecting spirit, our household genius" (127). With Henry Sr., there was a similar feeling, particularly during the vastation crisis. While he was fixing himself to his dinner-table position, he says there were "moments of when I resolved to abandon the vain struggle, and communicate without more ado what seemed my sudden burden of inmost, implacable unrest to my wife" (60). Lewis notes that Henry Sr. seems to regress to childhood, in effect running to mommy with his troubles (52).

With William, the situation is the opposite. He does not want to burden the woman, yet it is unclear whether his concern is with her receiving the burden, or with him unloading it. The two Henrys are willing to let the household genius sort things out, but the stalwartly individualistic William must keep it to himself. Immediately after noting his reluctance to unburden himself, William characterizes the experience as a religious one. Perhaps this is the best sign of William's situation: he could not see the religious in any other than individualistic terms. The father unburdens himself to his wife; the son, on the other hand, retains himself.

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Isabella Stewart Gardner and WJ

by Randall Albright

*The great argument for another life is that Bostonians and Cambridgians may have a chance to see each other.*¹

William James and Isabella Stewart Gardner (ISG) were friends. Among their common endeavors of support were the Society for Psychical Research and encouragement for the Harvard Annex, later turned into Radcliffe College.² As far as the Society for Psychical Research, it is worth noting that Isabella Stewart Gardner's only child died at a young age. William and his wife Alice also suffered the loss of a child, Herman. The popularity of the "Spiritualist" movement in the American Victorian Era is still represented architecturally by the First Spiritual Temple on the corner of Exeter and Newbury Streets in Boston, built in 1884-85 for the Church of the Working Union of Progressive Spiritualists,³ and which has since been used as a movie theater, starting in 1913, and later as furniture and book stores. Most recently it has served as a "business creation" headquarters for the Internet Age.⁴

WJ said this to ISG about the opening of Fenway Court, now known as the *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum*:

At a quarter past eleven last night, my brother in law and I explored one room after another, and inquired of one person after another, to bid you good night and thank you for so *varissime* as entertainment. But you were not to be found, so I write this note instead.

And I may add, dear Madam, that the aesthetic perfection of all things (of which I will not speak, for you must be tired to death of praise thereof) seemed to have a peculiar effect on the company, making them quiet and docile and self-forgetful and kind, as if they had become children (though children are just the reverse!). It was a very extraordinary and wonderful moral influence expected by nobody, not designed, I am sure by you, but felt, I am confident by everyone to-day. Quite in the line of a Gospel miracle!⁵

The Gardner Museum's list of WJ works includes an edition of *Talks to Students On Some of Life's Ideals*, pamphlet editions of "The Energies of Men" and "Louis Agassiz," as well as the original collection of WJ letters edited by his son, Henry, which was released in 1920.

Isabella Stewart Gardner died in 1924.

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Isabella Stewart Gardner

by John Singer Sargent (1888)

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

¹ from a letter, William James to Isabella Stewart Gardner, December 31, 1886.

² Biographies on WJ and ISG discuss their support for women's education.

³ Noted by Ross Urquhart in *Boston: A Photographic Guide*. (New York: Dover, 1982), p. 71.

⁴ See <http://www.idealab.com/contact/#top>

⁵ from a letter, WJ to ISG, January 3, 1903.

WWJD:

Would William James Doubt?

by Paul Jerome Croce

One of the latest forms of with-it evangelicalism is the craze for the WWJD initials. It stands for “What Would Jesus Do?” and it adorns tee-shirts and hats and especially bright red wrist bands for an ardent band of true believers. It is an unembarrassed reminder that as evangelical Christians, they want to live their lives “with Jesus in the driver’s seat,” choosing actions that Jesus would do. My favorite rendition of this slogan was on a poster showing a strong, sweaty, and fashionably athletic young man riding a bike and wearing the WWJD wrist band prominently; the headline read: “Saving the World One Wrist at a Time.”

Bracketing for now the worth of that religious enterprise and the extent to which evangelicals are also engaged in a range of other activities whose intolerance seems distinctly un-Christlike, this latest religious fashion raises questions about the possibility for finding guidance in the thoughts and actions of particular historical figures.

The initials are just close enough to those of one of my favorite philosophers to tempt me to ask a similar question: Would William James Doubt? After years of study and more years of admiring his bold and edifying response to the solvents of modernity and scientific skepticism, I thought I knew the answer to that question. “The Will to Believe” was designed to deal with such hesitancy, and it provided a justification for beliefs beyond empirical evidence. He gamely proclaimed the right to believe in the face of uncertainty, to act with boldness, in short to be as decisive as one of those evangelicals mentioned above. James was a coach for the intellectual and the indecisive, pointing the way to courage and risk-taking, while staring down the doubts generated by scientific scrutiny.

But lately, while in the process of learning a lot about James’s thoughts and contexts, I have sometimes doubted the plausibility of his coaching. His philosophy of action urges boldness, but his philosophy of theory formation is full of tentativeness. There is a tension between the James of belief formation and the James who pictures the world, with all his recognition of constant inquiry and with any one theory reflecting the angular truth of one’s temperament.

Adhering to all that advice for tolerance and inquiry can lead away from belief formation. It is, frankly, easier to be bold when one knows less—fewer facts to sift through and less awareness of the wholly different worlds that different worldviews portray. James himself even addresses this issue, when he says that average believers, far from needing the will to believe to encourage more believing, actually need more self-scrutiny and critiquing of their unexamined convictions.

Such easy faith is not the place for the will to believe, but for the will to inquire and to gain more knowledge. Those of us who are teachers can certainly relate to this message: our students and so many citizens in general

have a lot to learn. The world might be a better place if they would suspend their snap judgments until they gained more knowledge and especially more appreciation of complexity.

But for those of us who are already committed to inquiry, temperamentally and perhaps also in vocations that involve extensive learning and analysis, there is the opposite problem. Full fidelity to the selection and construction of facts and to the vast array of interpretive theories make the formation of convictions extremely difficult. In fact, such recognition, produced by immersion in James’s philosophy itself, can generate a paralyzing indecisiveness. The will to believe is a theory about action, yet ironically, it is easy to adopt it in theory without ever taking decisive action. And the lure of indecision is all the more tempting the more one knows.

The more I learn about James, the more I admire his stance because he developed it at the peak of his career when he was learning an immense amount and had become adept at understanding a host of competing philosophies; and he presented it alongside his view that theories are not absolutes, but instead are instruments for constant inquiry. Urging conviction in the face of this outlook was no easy task.

James’s philosophy of belief formation must be set alongside his philosophy of theory formation. They go together even though they generate opposite actions. The one leads to convictions; the other to inquiry. These then are the twin poles of James’s worldview. Intellectuals are very comfortable with constant learning, yet inquiry is only one mental virtue. Although non-intellectuals are often scorned by intellectuals, they can embody another vital mental trait: conviction. James presents inquiry and conviction as the complementary, often competing yin and yang of our mental life. As different people have different levels of each, they are also the competing engines of our social life. And it would be wise for intellectuals, especially admirers of William James, to recognize the virtues of each.

So, Would William James Doubt? He was, of course, no absolutist, so there will not be as many firm answers as with the wearers of the red wrist bands. In so many contexts, where unreflective belief and action are the rule of the day, readers of James with WWJD on their minds would naturally answer, Yes, James would urge doubting.

However, after extensive research, careful thought, and respectful tolerance of different viewpoints, James is asking us to do more than keep the channels of inquiry flowing. After a certain point, the answer is, No, the time for doubting is over.

The point of course is to find a way to raise enough doubts to prevent frivolous belief and to be accurate about the complexity of the world, but not so many that action becomes impossible—and that can happen not only to the scientific agnostics that James discusses in “The Will to Believe,” but also among students of James’s own work who are persuaded by his urge to steady inquiry and his acknowledgment of the constructedness of the world. James’s essay is justly famous for pitting James the bold

against the hesitancy of scientific skeptics; but it also reflects an internal tension within James's thought. His theory shows his resolution to put aside his passion for inquiry in favor of the need for convictions.

The insights of constant inquiry, no matter how accurate and fair, will provide slim motivation in themselves. Religious belief is often the source of such motivation, but the will to believe is not just for such beliefs, and its urge for conviction does not require religion. However, it does take a sense of judgment to know when there has been enough new learning and therefore to know when to allow the will to step in. We have probably all experienced this

when writing: after much background research, there is a time to start writing, even though there is more to read. Similarly, when taking action—whether it's pushing for social justice, organizing for the next election, or teaching the uninformed about non-polluting living—conviction will be at least as important as inquiry.

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Denying the Good Samaritan: Morality and Value Assessment Through Learned Self-Regulation

by Allison P. Hobgood

At the beginning of his first chapter in *Talks to Teachers*, James posited a fundamental notion concerning the relationship between psychology and education; he wrote, "Psychology is a science, and teaching is an art; and sciences never generate arts directly out of themselves" (James, 24). The implication of James's claim rests at the heart of larger issues surrounding both the psychology of teaching and educational philosophy as a field of study. Within this declaration, James suggested that to apply to education psychology in its most direct form is inherently faulty; too often, as psychology seeks the "ultimate truth," its formalist generalizations at their most literal do not enhance but confuse useful pedagogical practices.

Consider, for instance, James's philosophical belief that a teacher's primary task lies in "training the pupil to behavior" (James, 36). Most educators, in looking for quick, practical application of this idea, interpret James based on a literal definition of the term behave. Allen defined this term as to "act or react (in specified way); show good manners, conduct oneself well (esp. to or of child)" (Allen, 61). The words specified and manners are problematic as educators inevitably interpret each term in relation to fundamental, moral principle. Rather than focusing on behavior as action or reaction with no necessary moral basis, educators assume that action or reaction in its "specified" form must somehow adhere to proper moral ideology.

This immediate and faulty, formalistic interpretation of James's statement then compels educators to become moral parent-figures instead of pedagogical instructors. While education does involve the learning of moral principles, this practice should (and will) follow the act of becoming "generally" educated. As students acquire knowledge and broaden their spheres of influence and insight, moral deliberation becomes apparent and unavoidable. But unfortunately, by literally applying this

particular Jamesian, psychological concept to an educational philosophy, the primary act of teaching becomes the instillation of values and societal mores upon students.

In indoctrinating students with these decontextualized morals, well-intentioned teachers attempt to create consciousness instead of providing individuals with the necessary mechanisms for interpreting their own consciousness. James argued that, "consciousness itself... is adaptive and functional and makes it possible for individuals to engage in self-regulation" (Pajares, 5). Teachers, then, must promote methods for functional adaptation of an already established consciousness; by offering students through knowledge-based learning "a mass of possibilities of reaction" (James, 42), teachers invite the type of self-regulation and internal analysis that ultimately involves moral decision-making and value assessment.

Bearing all this in mind, teachers need not operate only as good Samaritans seeking the infusion of moral principle above all else. Instead, instructors must facilitate critical thought, providing students with methods by which "moral" learning can then take place. By imparting their general knowledge, teachers help students organize their acquired habits of conduct and tendencies to behavior (James, 37) in a manner that makes sense to them, a manner that will inevitably involve moral deliberation and conscious, self-regulation of these behaviors.

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Fundamental Questions

by *Leandro Gaitán*

Many have been the questions which have always troubled men. Reality is in itself a big question mark. But there are some questions which impel us to find an urgent answer because they are not postponable due to their outmost importance in our life. In effect, all our behavior is the result of the attitude adopted towards those questions. These fundamental human questions are for William James in "The Will to Believe" essay those of a moral and of a religious order, in which he was greatly influenced by his father, a theologian.

There are several alternatives to answer each of these questions. We should be able to decide in favor of one of them, even at the risk of failing. James made a distinction between live and dead hypotheses. The difference between them lies in the fact that the former are propositions of radical importance to our life, while the latter are deprived of it. For example, it is possible to live without problems ignoring subtle disquisitions regarding optics but, on the other hand, our behavior will be strongly conditioned by the position taken towards the existence of God or to certain moral matters.

Nevertheless, when having to make such important decisions, we found that the characteristic of these matters is that they do not have an answer that can be defined as scientific. On these topics, there is not a total and objective evidence as in the scientific answers (from which we cannot assert that answers exist of such kind; not at least in every case). In this item, James agrees with his teacher Renouvier, who opposes himself to the intellectual myth attributing to passion and free will the great task of making up our own belief.

On the other hand, I am also interested in pointing out James's attitude towards skepticism in relation to vital matters, restrictively asserting that the truth exists and that our mind's destiny is to apprehend it. Such a position implies the acknowledgement that, even though the objective evidence constitutes undoubtedly the ambition of everybody, it is necessary to know first that such an evidence constitutes an infinitely distant ideal in our life of thought. In the vital problems, knowledge suggests opposing alternatives, i.e. 'doubt'. But 'doubt' inhibits the human praxis; therefore it is vital to choose any of the hypotheses, even in danger of failing. Regarding all these questions, there is no other way out than choosing, since that is what men need to go on acting, to go on living.

The abstention of judgment, which in the religious field is known as Agnosticism, for fear of making a mistake, the option for the non-option until the answer manifests itself clearly and distinctively, can only be valid to the extent that such an abstention refers to a dead hypothesis, i.e. to non-compulsory options. But in relation to the great demands of the heart and regarding matters in which the reason of our existence takes part, such a skeptic indifference pulls us towards a blind ally.

It is very important, in all this, to highlight the place that passions occupy for James. The attitude of abstention, which is intellectually the best choice for many people, is caused by a passion that is the starting point of the decision and it is the fear of failing. This attitude is not less passionate than that of choosing between 'Yes' or 'No', and it does not prevent the one who adopts it from being deprived of the truth. Thus, sustaining skepticism with regard to the religious hypothesis until an absolute evidence is found, is to say that the fear of failing is more appropriate than agreeing to the hope of its truth.

Passions generally influence all our opinions, but there are certain choices in which, according to James, such an influence constitutes the determining factor. On this subject, James is a subsidiary of the Pascal's reflection about the heart. It is true that whenever there is an important option, the ideal is an intellect that judges without passion and is free from every favorite hypothesis. But the problem is raised when we become aware that it is not impossible to remain immutable in view of all the options until we are overwhelmed by the whole evidence.

Science can explain what exists, but only the heart allows us to contrast the values of what exists or what does not. What is more, James states that even science consults the heart when asserting categorically that absolute certainty about facts and the correction of false convictions represents wealth to men. From this perspective, the role played by the heart in men's lives is a priority. It is like the foundation of all thinking, and of all election behind which there is nothing.

Therefore, it is necessary to go out to meet the possible truth (hypothesis) instead of confining one's self into an obstinate intellectualism and dare to make a step into the abyss, since you cannot keep will at the side of the problem. Thus, facing a live hypothesis, e.g. the religious one, there are only two possible answers: 'yes' or 'no', because God exists or does not. But the one who abstains does not risk himself neither for one nor the other, so although it seems intellectually the wisest answer, this could never reach the truth. What remains is to risk oneself for 'yes' or for 'no', with equal chances to fail and to be right. Between the two options James prefers the 'yes', because when assessing the practical consequences of both answers, he does not hesitate in stating that making a choice for 'yes' is what benefits more the individual and society. Its consequences on human behavior are evidently superior.

The only idea of limiting our heart, instincts and courage, when adopting a passive attitude until our reason and senses are subdued by the evidence, is for James the most unusual idol that philosophy has ever produced. For that reason, we must be authentically empiricists, and this implies that we should acknowledge that there is not within us an organ of perfect and infallible knowledge that allows us to know all the things with lapidary objectivity.

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“The One and the Many”: WJ and his Contexts

by Amy Kittelstrom

Why has William James, from the time of his own life through today, appealed to so many thinkers from so many backgrounds writing in so many disciplines? The first part of the answer to this question points to the transitional aspect of his intellectual figure. He wrote and thought in a period of American intellectual history between the ripening of a distinctively American intellectual tradition—American Romanticism—and the fracturing of intellectuals into disciplinary divisions, a necessary consequence of professionalization. The second part of the answer is more specific to James himself, and that is his unique position within that transitional moment as a connector to diverse communities of inquiry—scientific, religious, and ethical. In consequence, his legacy continues to bridge areas that have since become distinct from one another in American intellectual life but were, at the *fin-de-siècle*, more consistently understood to be relational. Finally, a third reason that James’s work has enjoyed such broad popularity also answers the question of why it should continue to do so: a social individualism at the heart of his work that rests on a vital theory of interdependence, which both reconnects sundered academic disciplines and mandates awareness of the reciprocal obligations between self and society. This essay will examine James’s transitional moment, his intellectual community, and his social individualism in the context of contemporary academia.

A Great Man and His Environment

In 1880, James published an essay called, “Great Men, Great Thoughts, and the Environment,” in which he countered the popular views of social Darwinist Herbert Spencer. Once admired by James, Spencer argued that individuals made no difference in the course of societies because they were the inevitable products of large, slow, inexorable forces that followed Darwinian models of natural selection. The chilling implications of this materialist philosophy included not only a disavowal of interventionist government policies that would help the poor, but also applause for such draconian measures as England’s corn laws, which swept peasants from their land and hastened, thereby, nature’s termination of their ilk.¹

Such materialist determinism stultified James in his twenties, when he was vocationally torn between science, art, and philosophy, but when he wrote “Great

Men” at age 38 he dispatched with élan the arguments that had once puzzled him. “The fact is that Mr. Spencer’s sociological method is...of little more scientific value than the Oriental method of replying to whatever question arises by the unimpeachable truism, ‘God is great,’” he wrote.² He insisted on the importance of individuals both as doers and as models, suggesting the responsiveness of the environment to the efforts of individuals without dismissing the effect of the environment on those subject to its conditions. This simple acknowledgment of interdependence occupied the base of a more complex understanding of cause and effect. James described an endless chain of relational dependencies as one “great man” follows an idea that is then followed by countless other universe-shapers, and the resultant new conditions in turn influence a fresh set of individuals to have and follow their own ideas. The basic malleability of the universe would appear in James’s philosophy again and again, always with moral purpose.

In this article, James targeted the Spencerian Grant Allen in particular. Allen responded to James in a personal letter with a cordial insistence that he was not at all moved from his materialist determinism by James’s argument. Allen believed they disagreed over “what *ought* we to interest ourselves in; what, to a philosophic mind, *ought* to seem the most important—the differences that separate John Smith from John Noakes, or the differences that separate both from Ah Ling and Inashie.”³ This sidestepped James’s central contention that a determinism that closed the universe to the efforts of individuals ignored scientific reason, not to mention the necessity of free will to the adoption of moral goals.

Allen’s argument also anticipated a historiographical debate that would arise in the second half of the twentieth century over the optimal goals and methods of historical inquiry: should the “great man” theory of history be chucked in favor of a social history that digs up overlooked groups such as laborers, women, and ethnic minorities? Just as Allen favored the comparison of large aggregates of individuals rather than of specific individuals’ characteristics, social historians starting in the 1970s used statistics and probate records to make historical claims about such groups instead of continuing to reify those dead white men who had so long dominated the field.

¹ See for example John Offer, ed., *Herbert Spencer, Political Writings* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 80-95.

² William James, “Great Men, Great Thoughts, and the Environment,” *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1880, p. 449. It is important to realize that to oppose “social Darwinism” neither means to oppose Darwinian evolution nor even its application to societies. Indeed, James’s article uses a precise, accurate understanding of Darwin’s separation of “necessary” from “sufficient” conditions to dismantle Spencerian logic, as well as Darwin’s focus on the fate of genetic variations rather than their cause. *Ibid.*, p. 451, 444.

³ From Charles Grant Blairfindie Allen to William James, April 6, 1881, in Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, eds., *The Correspondence of William James*, v. 5, 1878-1884 (Charlottesville, VA: the University of Virginia Press, 1997), p. 159.

This is not the place to historicize the historical discipline—although mentioning the sea-change of social history so briefly does it injustice—but the shared rejection of a “great man” theory of history by Allen and the social historians points to a problem James scholars must face. How can one continue to squeeze greater precision and relevance out of a much-told story—the life and work of William James—when so many untold millions of stories remain hidden from the public eye? James’s own theory of interdependence, resting on the role of experience in a pluralistic universe that is both one and many, provides the answer. James’s work reflects his times and his times produced his work, so studying both together as an interdependent unit with literally endless connections to the rest of that era’s world builds an increasingly detailed picture of an overdetermined moment. As James put it, “social evolution is a resultant of the interaction of two wholly distinct factors: the individual, deriving his peculiar gifts from the play of physiological and intra-social forces, but bearing all the power of initiative and origination in his hands; and, second, the social environment, with its power of adopting or rejecting both him and his gifts.”⁴

Academic Contexts

What Alexis de Tocqueville is to politics, William James is to contemporary American thought. That is, whereas politicians of all stripes can find support in words penned by the nineteenth-century French liberal aristocrat, scholars from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds find inspiration in the works of William James. Literary critics, psychologists, educators, social scientists, philosophers, religious scholars, cultural critics, and historians all utilize James’s ideas. Each of these types of intellectuals comes from a specific disciplinary training, and the contours of that discipline inform the approach scholastic inquiry will take. This methodology makes it hard for scholars from different disciplines to behold the same James. For example, when an agnostic philosopher reads James through a disdain for spiritual experience, a scholar of religion who finds comfort in James’s openness to supernatural possibilities feels puzzled. When a literary critic calls on James’s advocacy of freedom to support departing from textualist confines into the free play of creative expression, a psychologist who admires James’s diagram of mental processes is not at home. Loosely speaking, in religious studies scholars

of James can compare his theories to other religious systems with no regard for contextual differences, in literary studies scholars can use James’s theories as lenses through which to read other texts of different times and places, and in philosophy scholars who consider themselves intellectual descendants of James can both clarify and further his project with close analysis of his texts in either isolation or creative combination.⁵ These disciplinary differences arose over the period of James’s life as a consequence of professionalization, and the ensuing specialization intensified over the twentieth century.

Two disciplinary areas that have produced the plurality of scholarship on James are biography and intellectual history. For biographers the problem of selection determines which aspects of James’s rich, broad life they will emphasize. His first biographer, Ralph Barton Perry, focused on James’s formal thought and presented a progressive life story with James moving steadily toward the radical empiricism and pragmatism that Perry considered his major contribution.⁶ The most recent biographer, Linda Simon, chose instead to emphasize the vicissitudes of his health, ambition, and sexuality—showing the reader James as an ordinary, extraordinary man.⁷ Many intellectual historians seek to mitigate this problem of selection by taking a contextual approach to James’s thought, sketching the cultural history through which they allege James operated. This results in arguments that claim the center of James’s vision to be focused on a contemporary crisis such as a post-Civil War loss of purpose or a growing unease with religiosity.⁸ Such studies seek to bridge the perspectival problems of disciplinary fracturing and understand James from the vantage point of his own time.

All of these approaches succumb to what James

4. James, “Great Men,” p. 448. My use of the term “overdetermined” to signify the uncountable multiplicity of factors in producing any one phenomenon follows that of Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 9. This is similar to what Robert Berkhofer means when he describes the “past as plenitude.” See Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 33.

5. The best example of an agnostic philosopher reading James is Richard Rorty; see for an example Rorty, “Religious Faith, intellectual responsibility, and romance,” in Ruth Anna Putnam, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to William James* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 84-102. For a scholar of religion, see Robert J. O’Connell, S.J., *William James on the Courage to Believe* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1984). For a literary critic, see Santiago Colas, “Try Swimming,” <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~scolas/swimming.htm>. For a psychologist, see Richard Preston Chiles, *William James: A Damaged Self Journeys Toward Reparation*, unpublished dissertation, Northwestern University, 1990. A good example of a comparative religious study that uses pragmatism is Judy Dee Whipps, *Philosophy and Social Activism: An Exploration of the Pragmatism and Activism of Jane Addams, John Dewey, and Engaged Buddhism*, unpublished dissertation, The Union Institute, 1998. For a literary study using James as a lens, see Alex Zwerdling, *The James Brothers and the Psychological Interpretation of Romantic Philosophy*, unpublished dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1997. Finally, for an excellent philosophical study of James that both deeply comprehends and furthers his project, see David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

6. Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1935).

calls “a certain blindness in human beings.”⁹ They take a visible part of the story for the story itself, neither reaching for nor fully sensing the extra contexts that both produced James’s concerns and made his responses to those concerns vital and enduring. In a complete sense, a thorough unpacking of James’s historical moment is impossible; the blindnesses outnumber the possible insights; the contexts are too many and their interrelations too complex. Yet just as James continually strove to dispel his “ancestral” blindness through experience and the patient relation of truths, whatever steps scholars can take to minimize blind spots by adding contextual perspectives to James’s ideas benefit the public understanding of his work and his historical era.¹⁰ One of the most positive moves in this direction is to step back from the relatively narrow timeframe of his career and see his intellectual context in a larger historical perspective. James and his intellectual cohorts were produced by the generation that reigned before they came of age.

A Romantic Generation

It is not uncommonly known that Ralph Waldo Emerson enjoyed a substantial friendship with James’s father, the Swedenborgian Henry James, and that therefore Emerson appeared frequently at the James family home for dinner or tea and conversation.¹¹ In and of itself, this fact does more to amplify claims to greatness James’s admirers would make for him than to contribute to a meaningful description of his intellectual climate. His family’s circumstantial connection to the American Romantics did not so much determine James’s ties to the trans-Atlantic intellectual movement of which Emerson was a part as did his entire generation’s reliance on the Romantics for ideas. Late-nineteenth-century American

intellectuals drew on European and American Romantics’ ideas about the possible function of nature, non-Christian spirituality, the availability of Asian vocabulary and models for selfhood and divinity, the problem of evil, and the role of ideals in guiding one’s actions in the world.

Romanticism was such an immense, complex movement that some literary scholars speak of “Romanticism and Romanticisms” to challenge the idea that the term can operate as a unitary whole.¹² Certainly it is too complex a subject to explicate with any precision here. But it is not necessary to make claims about the nature of Romanticism as a whole in order to indicate how it functioned as a common pool of resources for post-Romantic intellectuals. First of all, nineteenth-century white middle class American culture was in many ways a literary and an oral culture, one in which spouses read aloud to one another, letter-writing was part of one’s daily life, and books were shared and criticized among circles of friends.¹³ Secondly, since Emerson enjoyed the height of his public career at about the time of James’s birth, and since American Transcendentalism followed both English Romanticism and its German root, the entire canon of Romantic literature was available to late Victorians to fuel this literary culture. Finally, American Transcendentalism established Boston in particular as a cosmopolitan intellectual center, both connecting it to European high culture and suggesting a distinctive American coming-of-age through the production of original work.¹⁴ Late Victorians like James who located their own intellectual production in Boston saw their Transcendentalist forebears as just that: ancestors whose work prepared the ground for them.

James’s own sense of intellectual indebtedness to the Boston Romantics is apparent in his work, particularly in his essays. The anti-Spencerian article “Great Men” includes a section on Boston that invokes the lost

7. Linda Simon, *Genuine Reality: A Life of William James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

8. One study that emphasizes James’s non-participation in the Civil War as a challenge to his sense of vocation and even manhood is George Cotkin, *William James: Public Philosopher* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). Another study plugs in the cultural histories of two other works on the same period for James’s context. T.J. Jackson Lears argues that American culture suffered a crisis of authority and self-making in *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1981). Paul Carter identifies the period with the widely repeated (but rarely investigated) term “spiritual crisis” in *Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974). Bennett Ramsey takes these cultural contexts as substitutes for James’s context and argues for the contemporary purpose of James’s religious ideas in *Submitting to Freedom: The Religious Vision of William James* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

9. His article, “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” is widely anthologized, available in John J. McDermott, ed., *The Work of William James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). James uses this metaphor of blindness in his daily life as well as in his formal writings, referring warmly in his correspondence, for example, to experiences that help him “dispel the blindness.”

10. In his essay, “What Makes a Life Significant,” James wondered where his days’ heroes were, and then saw a laborer working atop a skyscraper. “And now I perceived, by a flash of insight, that I had been steeping myself in pure ancestral blindness, and looking at life with the eyes of a remote spectator.” *Ibid.*, p. 649.

11. Cited in Simon, *Genuine Reality*, p. 17-21.

12. For a classic intellectual history approach to Romanticism, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, “On the Discrimination of Romanticisms,” in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948; New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1955). Lovejoy argues that Romanticism is too crude a term to describe the many subtle variations within and between what is now called by its name.

13. This is one of the strong themes of Lori Kenschaft’s study of the marriage of Alice Freeman Palmer and the George Palmer, one of James’s colleagues at Harvard. *Lori J. Kenschaft, Marriage, Gender, and Higher Education: the Personal and Public Partnership of Alice Freeman Palmer and George Herbert Palmer, 1886-1902*, unpublished dissertation, Boston University, 1999.

14. On the role of Romanticism in America, see Charles Capper, *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

days of Transcendentalist flourishing much as the second generation of Puritans reminisced in the 1670s about the spiritual purity of New England's founding generation.¹⁵ In a long list of great Boston intellectuals, James included Channing, Parker, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Fuller, Emerson, and Whittier—all Romantics—as well as other political and intellectual leaders whom some intellectual historians have classified as “Romantic reformers.”¹⁶ He credited both this generation for contributing to the spirit of Boston and the character of Bostonians for appreciating these intellectual greats. In later essays the role of specific Romantic ideas is more prominent, whereas this example indicates more of the symbolic role those intellectuals played for James's generation.

James's correspondence reveals how Romantic works acted as a common literary currency among members of James's intellectual cohort. His frequent inclusion of brief references to Romantics shows his expectation that the recipient of his letter will be able to fill in the meaning; for example, when courting his wife James reports his natural gravitation toward “Fichte's *Glückwürdigkeit, nicht glücklichheit*.”¹⁷ In other letters he refers to “Carlyle's gospel of ‘Work,’” Emerson on love, and Wordsworth on mundane delight, all with a brevity that suggests his strong expectation of his correspondent's familiarity with not only the writers themselves, but with their ideas.¹⁸ He and his correspondents also refer to the publication of new volumes about Romantics, such as an 1884 biography of Carlyle, with the assumption that they will all read them.¹⁹ This common reading helped them cohere as peers.

Romantics like Goethe, Carlyle, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Fichte, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman shared

certain habits and concerns that mattered to James and his peers. They challenged institutional forms of religion without questioning the importance of religious feeling; in fact, they challenged institutional religion because they valued religious feeling. They cultivated spirituality through experiences of nature, which included scientific observation, and through the application of ideals to the conduct of life.²⁰ They believed in their own minds as sites of religious inquiry, and from this believed in their poetry and prose as something like scripture.²¹ Artifacts of nature, images of woman, exotic Asian symbols of divinity, all were grist for the mill of Romantic self-expression and therefore of spiritual production.

In many ways James began with these Romantic ideas and founded his philosophy on experience and continual, unfolding, individual discovery. Experience is the pragmatic test of belief, and experience is the site of religious truth—not systematic theology.²² He also believed, with the Romantics, that ideals were imperative to a life lived rightly. In a Whitman-inspired passage, James faults the daily toiler for ignoring sunsets and overlooking the fact that “this world never did anywhere or at any time contain more of essential divinity, or of eternal meaning, than is embodied in the fields of vision over which his eyes so carelessly pass. There is life; and there, a step away, is death. There is the only kind of beauty there ever was. There is the old human struggle and its fruits together. There is the text and the sermon, the real and the ideal in one.”²³ Ideas of essential divinity, eternal meaning, and a unitary existence encompassing the ideal with the real pepper Romantic writings, and appear here with moral force in James.

This does not mean that James was essentially no more than a Romantic, himself; it does not mean that his philosophical project was a mere refinement of the

15. This is the argument of Perry Miller in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

16. William James, “Great Men,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. XLVI, October 1880, p. 454. For the linking of Romanticism and reform, see especially John L. Thomas, “Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865,” *American Quarterly* (Winter 1965), p. 656-674.

17. “Good fortune does not equal happiness” is my own rough translation. William James to Alice Howe Gibbens, October 9, 1876. In the collection at Harvard's Houghton Library, bMS Am 1092.9 (1160-2487).

18. On Carlyle, letter to Joseph Milsand, Feb. 5, 1885, in Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, ed., *The Correspondence of William James, v. 6, 1885-1889* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), p. 7. The Emerson and Wordsworth references are in Skrupskelis and Berkeley, *Correspondence, v. 4, 1856-1877* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), p. 246, 488. There are many more such mentions.

19. James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of His Life in London* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1884). Other examples include Froude's *Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle, 3 vols.*, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1883), referred to in a letter of the same year in which James tells of his reading “what I suppose you have been reading too.” Skrupskelis and Berkeley, ed., *Correspondence, v. 5*, p. 446.

20. The seminal text on Romanticism is M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953). His basic argument is that the Romantics' theory of art changed from reflecting reality to expressing it. My representation of Romanticism bears one important difference from his. He writes: “It was only in the early Victorian period, when all discourse was explicitly or tacitly thrown into the two exhaustive modes of imaginative and rational, expressive and assertive, that religion fell together with poetry in opposition to science, and that religion, as a consequence, was converted into poetry, and poetry into a kind of religion.” *Ibid.*, p. 335. In fact, the Victorians did not see a conflict between religion and science—many in James's own post-Darwin generation also denied such a conflict—and therefore this dichotomy fails.

21. Perry Miller defined Transcendentalism as fundamentally “a religious demonstration” in *The Transcendentalists* (1950; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 8.

22. To contrast with his own rich, vivid examples of religious experience in his Gifford lectures, James wrote: “surely the systematic theologians are the closet-naturalists of the deity,” meaning that they have no direct experience of spiritual truths but only classify and handle them under dry, controlled conditions. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in Writings, 1902-1910 (New York: Library of America, 1987), p. 400.

A Social Individualist

Romantic project. His was no monism like that of Emerson. He particularly disagreed with the idea that the universe was fixed in its essence, waiting only to be discovered. Rather, the Romantic breaking-open of spiritual ideas to non-Christian inquiry enabled James to root his religious conception in experience and ethics. The centrality of individual minds to Romantic explorations of selfhood and meaning led the way for James to agree with Victor Cousin's claim, "Psychology is...the vestibule of philosophy," and use it as an entry to metaphysics and theories of truth.²⁴ The availability of the Romantics as a group of models for James's generation also led them to temper their working lives with mountain retreats, like the one James shared in the Adirondacks with a dozen other Boston-based intellectuals.²⁵

One of James's correspondents exemplifies the centrality of the Romantic generation for the late Victorians. Charles Carroll Everett was president of Harvard Divinity School for many years and wrote a study of Fichte's thought that James read, admired, and mentioned in a letter to another correspondent with the expectation of familiarity.²⁶ Everett wrote an 1881 letter to James that focused on his replication of a scientific experiment that James had apparently related to Everett. It involved an optical illusion and intense sensation produced by turning one's head upside down. This much shows a similar continuity of science and religion to that Romantics, especially Goethe and Thoreau, practiced. As a postscript Everett transcribed a quotation from the Tala-vakara Upanishad: "By him who thinks that Brahma is not comprehended, by him he is comprehended; he who thinks that Brahma is comprehended, does not know him. Brahma is unknown to those that know him, & known to those who do not know him."²⁷ It seems incongruous for Everett to pair an empirical exercise in optics with an excerpt from an arcane religious scripture, but he was surely following a Romantic model with its own standards for unifying inquiry. James and his peers, imbibing Romanticism from their youth, continued an American tradition of coordinating individual experience, scientific observation, and religious inquiry.

Later pragmatists, particularly George Herbert Mead, developed theories of the social self both to describe the nature of existence and to prescribe ethical conduct. In James's method of focusing on individual experiences, he seemed to miss the opportunity to tether selfhood to societal good. However, the relation of self to society is at the very heart of James's life work in part because his own participation in a community of inquirers honed his arguments, supplied him with material, and stimulated his thinking. He started in science, and keeping in dialogue with his one-time student G. Stanley Hall helped him keep abreast of experimental developments in the New Psychology. James also circulated in religious circles, corresponding not only with Everett but also with the mystic Benjamin Paul Blood, who supplied James with vivid tales of his spiritual experiences. In formal philosophy James sparred with many colleagues, most famously with Josiah Royce, whom James admired, from whose work he drew, and whose monistic idealism he delighted in unraveling. His work at the junction of these intellectual zones made him more aware of the social dimension of being.

More profoundly, though, the current that ran throughout James's diverse body of work carried this concern for the role of the individual in the world. In the early essay "Great Men," James showed how the interrelationship between individual and larger social conditions keep the one producing the other, how the responsiveness of one's environment to one's efforts encourage those efforts, and how even a single individual's positive striving can lead, through reverberating effects, an entire community in the direction of those enacted ideals. This understanding of interdependence appeared again in the 1890 *Principles of Psychology* with the "wider self," and again in the essays and addresses first compiled in *Talks to Teachers*, where the function of ideals plays so strong a part. Every time James argued against determinism—be it materialist or monist—he was arguing for the ability of individuals to shape their environment and for their responsibility to affect the malleable universe beneficially. He invoked an essential divinity, yes, but it was a pluralistic divinity, an unfinished divinity, a divinity to which every social individual must contribute.

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23. From James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," in McDermott, ed., *The Writings of William James*, p. 640.

24. Cousin is quoted in Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England: a History* (1876; Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1965), p. 68.

25. James mentions the others he expects to meet in the Adirondack lodge in an 1884 letter to the ethical culturalist William Salter, found in Skrupskelis and Berkeley, ed., *Correspondence v. 5* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), p. 503.

26. The letter can be found in *Ibid.*, p. 537.

27. C.C. Everett to James, Feb. 18, 1881, *Ibid.*, p. 152-3.

Divided We Stand: Pragmatism, Bergsonianism, Agency, and Intimacy by Myron Silberstein

William James, in a 1909 essay entitled “Bergson and his Critique of Intellectualism,” credits Henri Bergson with having “led [him] personally to renounce the intellectualistic method” (561),¹ thus allowing him to “join step with reality with a philosophical conscience never quite set free before” (578). These laudatory words signify what is perhaps James’s most profound break with his earlier doctrine of pragmatism; indeed, pragmatism and Bergsonianism offer two nearly opposing conceptions of truth. This essay will argue that the competing intuitions that caused James to identify himself with both doctrines are fundamental to the human condition. Moreover, the balance that each individual establishes between these two intuitions dictates both the strength of his or her agency and his or her capacity for intimacy.

The pragmatic method, with which James is most commonly associated, consists in asking, when deciding between conflicting propositions, “what practical consequences would be different if one side rather than the other were true” (207). The answer to this question reveals the proposition’s “cash-value in experiential terms” (430). We can thus think of true propositions as those that have the highest cash-value. Indeed, James argues not only that the truth, but also the *meaning* of a proposition “can always be brought down to some particular consequence, in our future practical experience” (349).

Pragmatism is in part a corrective to the “specious and verbal” disputes (349) that litter philosophical discussion. As James notes, “[t]here can be no difference which doesn’t make a difference” (349); two opposing philosophical doctrines that produce identical consequences must “mean radically the same thing” (349). One of James’s goals as a pragmatist is to eliminate inconsequential arguments from philosophical discourse and return it to its deeper project of “find[ing] out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the one which is true” (349).

Aside from its role in elevating philosophical discussion, though, the pragmatic approach to truth may seem counterintuitive; surely, some things are simply true, regardless of their consequences for human endeavors. For pragmatism, though, truth “is not a stagnant property inherent in [an idea]. Truth *happens*

to an idea. It ... is *made* true by events” (430). Truth, for the pragmatist, is unfinished business, and in its completion, “our active preference is a legitimate part of the game” (344). This does not mean that we may bend the truth to suit our fancy. I might prefer that it be true that I am a millionaire; if I accept this notion to be true, though, I am likely to start bouncing checks. Because of the negative practical consequences of accepting the proposition that I am a millionaire, the cash-value of that proposition is significantly lower than that of the more modest proposition that reflects my actual financial status.

The doctrine of pragmatism is closely aligned with James’s equally famous doctrine of the will to believe. Intended originally as a “defence of our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters” (717), the will to believe allows the individual to choose among epistemically undecidable propositions according to his “passional tendencies and volitions” (722). Indeed, James asserts that “[o]ur *passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds*” (723).

The will to believe is most dramatically effective when applied to epistemically undecidable propositions about which “[t]he [agent’s] belief creates its verification” (341). James’s paradigmatic example of such a proposition concerns a hapless mountaineer who finds himself on a precipice “from which the only escape is by a terrible leap” (337). The mountaineer has no evidence that he will be able to make the leap, but the only way for him to “nerve [his] feet to execute” a successful jump (337) is to create the belief that he can do so. In such an instance, “belief is one of the indispensable preliminary conditions of the realization of its object” (337). James therefore asserts that “[w]herever the facts to be formulated” depend on the nature of our belief, “we may logically, legitimately, and inexpugnably believe what we desire” (341). Indeed, in such instances, “[t]he truths cannot become true till our faith has made them so” (337).

Both the pragmatic method and the will to believe place the individual in a decidedly agential relationship to his surroundings. For the pragmatist, “[t]he *true*’ ... is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as *the right*’ is only the expedient in the way of our behaving” (438). Indeed, concepts “have ... no meaning and no reality if they have no use” (461). The pragmatist does not deny that concrete, unambiguous situations and events occur in the external world; these “facts”, however, “are not *true*. They simply *are*. Truth is the function of beliefs that start and terminate among them” (439). Moreover, beliefs function primarily as “rules for action” (348); thus, in the pragmatic conception of truth, “[t]he ultimate test ... of what a truth means is ... the conduct it dictates or inspires” (348). Pragmatism,

¹ All quotations can be found in *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*. John J. McDermott, Editor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

therefore, suggests a sharp *distinction* between the agent and his surroundings. The boundaries between concepts are delineated by possibilities for action, and these boundaries are articulated by an agent who is external to the concepts he articulates.

Even prior to his public conversion to Bergsonianism, James's writing betrays a certain ambivalence toward the pragmatic conception of truth. In his 1879 essay on "The Sentiment of Rationality" — an essay that touts the pragmatic benefits of the will to believe — James argues that "[e]very way of classifying a thing is but a way of handling it for some particular purpose" (321). As James cautions, though, "[n]o abstract concept can be a valid substitute for a concrete reality except with reference to a particular interest in the conceiver" (321). Although our conceptual beliefs serve us well as "teleological instruments" (321), they do not provide us information about "the living fact" (320) that resides in non-conceptualized experiences.

James's 1884 essay on "The Function of Cognition" approvingly refers to John Grote's distinction between "knowledge about things" and "acquaintance with [the] things all this knowledge is about" (141). Knowledge about things is largely predictive and is therefore instrumental in guiding our behavior toward things. As James writes, it is "an anticipatory name for a further associative and terminative process that may occur" (155). Knowledge of things, in contrast, involves "an all-round embracing of the [object] by the thought" (156). Articulating this distinction aphoristically, James defines "two ways of knowing things, knowing them immediately or intuitively, and knowing them conceptually or representatively" (154). James, thus, posits the existence of a "reality that lies beyond the horizon of direct consciousness," which the individual recognizes only as "a terminal *more* existing in a certain direction, to which [conceptual knowledge] might lead but [does] not lead yet" (148). Our surroundings, it seems, possess a variety of truth that is not contingent upon our interactions with them.

James's allegiance to a concept-based notion of truth is further diminished by his development of the doctrine of radical empiricism, first expressed in the 1904 essay "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?". In this essay, James argues that "the immediate experience" of "plain, unqualified actuality," which is "only virtually or potentially either object or subject as yet," is, in its "*naïf* immediacy ... always 'truth'" (177-78). Concepts are what he later calls "a retrospective patchwork, a post-mortem dissection" (577) of our original, undifferentiated apperceptions. Truth resides in a preconceptual flux of experience, but, through our use of concepts, "what is objective originally forever turns subjective, turns into our apprehension of the object" (178). Concepts vitiate the purity of our experience; as James notes in "The Thing and its Relations," written in 1905,

"[o]nly new-born babes, or men in semi-coma ..., may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense of a *that* which is not yet any definite *what*" (215). Purity of experience, thus, is "only a relative term, meaning the proportional amount of un verbalized sensation which it still embodies" (215).

James's suspicion that truth is not to be found in concepts comes to full bloom through his engagement with Bergson. From a Bergsonian standpoint, not only do concepts subjectivize reality; they falsify it. The essence of reality, for Bergson, is its constant flux, which can be perceived only through "a stroke of intuitive sympathy" (577) that is absent from conceptual thought. Whereas "percepts are continuous," James notes, "concepts are discrete" (233). Concepts, thus, obscure the dynamic nature of reality, since, "when we substitute concepts for percepts, we substitute their relations also. But since the relations of concepts are of static comparison only, it is impossible to substitute them for the dynamic relations with which the perceptual flux is filled" (246). Concepts, in short, cannot explain how reality proceeds, for "[t]he stages into which you analyze [reality] are *states*, the change itself goes on between them" (565).

It is not surprising, therefore, that James illustrates Bergson's concerns about the inadequacy of concepts by referring to Zeno's famous paradoxes of motion. To review these briefly, let us consider a race between Achilles and a tortoise. If we allow the tortoise to begin the race even slightly ahead of Achilles, it seems as if Achilles can never pass the tortoise. By the time he bridges the original gap between himself and the tortoise, the tortoise will have advanced beyond him. By the time he bridges this second, smaller gap, the tortoise will have advanced again. This sequence of bridging and advancing will continue to infinity. The apparent impossibility of motion originates in the use of concepts that describe motion as "a set of one-to-one relations between space-points and time-points" (564). This definition of motion allows us to construct graphs reconstructing and predicting the positions of a body moving at a steady speed, but fails to indicate "how the body gets from one position to another" (564-65). As James notes, "enumerating ... dots and cuts will not give you [a] continuum" (247). The use of concepts forces us to admit the impossibility of a phenomenon that we experience constantly. By extrapolation, conceptual thought leads "to the opinion that perceptual experience is not reality at all, but an appearance or illusion" (246).

James grants that undifferentiated reality is "too concrete to be entirely manageable" (569). In its eagerness to create order, however, conceptual thought "cut[s] out and fix[es]" static cross-sections of reality "and exclude[s] everything but [what has been] fixed" (574). There is a false preciseness to conceptual think-

ing; “[a] concept,” James indicates, “means a *that-and-no-other*” (574). In reality, though, “each ... thing proves to be many different without undergoing the necessity of breaking into disconnected editions of itself” (576). Whereas concepts provide distinctions between phenomena so that we may act upon our surroundings with greater effectiveness, “in the real concrete sensible flux of life,” James suggests, “experiences compenetrates each other” in a way that defies distinction (574). With its false distinctions and its denial of all that it cannot encompass, conceptual thought, James argues, “makes experience less instead of more intelligible” (565).

If the pragmatic conception of truth is counterintuitive, the Bergsonian conception is no less so. Let us imagine that I am at a restaurant and that I order a salad. When the salad arrives, my dinner partner, who knows of my Bergsonian suspicion of concepts, asks how I can be so bold as to eat the object in front of me. If conceptualization distorts reality, how can I be certain that what I eat is really a salad, rather than, for example, a scorpion? Likewise, if distinctions are false, my dinner partner and the salad are one, so by eating the salad I will become a cannibal.

In this example, my companion misunderstands the manner in which concepts distort reality. Concepts do not mislead by suggesting that what is really a scorpion is, instead, a salad. Nor ought we to expect that what we perceive as a salad will behave like a scorpion. Although the elements of our experiences compenetrates each other, they are not entirely coextensive with each other. Concepts are suitable, therefore, for articulating the extremes of experience; what they fail to do is to articulate the subtleties of experience. It is coherent for me to speak of myself in the distant past — who I was as a young child, for example — as if I am speaking about a different person. Barring radical changes in personality, however, it is not coherent for me to speak in this manner about my more recent past. Temporally proximate instantiations of myself compenetrates each other, whereas temporally distant instantiations of myself do not. A similar argument can be made about spatially proximate phenomena and behaviorally or functionally proximate phenomena. We can thus think of experiential compenetration like a chain in which neighboring links are connected while the extremities of the chain remain distinct.

Given the behavioral and functional distance between salads and scorpions, I can be confident that, although the word “salad” does not describe the *entire* nature of the object in front of me, that object can, for practical purposes, be *treated* like a salad and *not* like a scorpion. Indeed, if, from a misguided effort to counterbalance the pernicious effects of conceptual distinctions, I were to treat the object as if it were a scorpion, I would simply execute my agency foolishly. Nor would

my doing so bring me closer to understanding the subtleties of that object. If we are to make conceptual distinctions, we should do so by the rules. The question is why we should employ concepts at all if they distort reality.

The answer is that our agency requires sensitivity to practical facts at the expense of undifferentiated Reality; as James writes, we “*harness up* reality in our conceptual systems in order to drive it the better” (569). This has been made apparent in the preceding example, but a further scenario will reinforce the point. Imagine a medieval knight patrolling the moat of his lord’s castle. Seeing a man approach on horseback, the knight calls out, “Friend or foe?” The man, who is a soldier for the Mystics’ Liberation Army (MLA) responds indignantly, “How dare you try to concretize me!” and promptly unleashes a cloud of poisonous vapor that causes the knight to lose the ability to make conceptual distinctions.

What should be clear is that the knight’s question does not solicit information about the nature of the mystic. Rather, he wants to know how to confront the mystic. “Friend” and “foe” are conceptual shorthands, not for Reality, but for facts to be employed as guides for action. “Foe” signifies a suitable object for physical attack and “friend” signifies an unsuitable object for physical attack. It is necessary that the knight decide whether to attack; to suspend judgment in favor of mystical contemplation is, from an agential perspective, equivalent to making a positive decision *not* to attack. Therefore, it is necessary that the knight employ conceptual distinctions if he is to execute his duty.

This explanation notwithstanding, it is easy to recognize why the mystic takes offense at the knight’s question. As James acknowledges, conceptual thought is preferable to the direct apprehension of reality *only* inasmuch as it allows us to “make short cuts through experience” (573). Because of the “‘universal’ character” of concepts and “their capacity for association with one another in great systems,” James writes, “they outstrip the tardy consecutions of ... things themselves” (204). The nature of a short cut, though, is that it bypasses the totality of an experience, excluding all details that are not explicitly relevant to the goal at hand. If we skim through a mystery novel in order to find out whodunit, we may be able to name the villain, but the book itself will have been ignored. We will have obtained knowledge about data within the book, but will have remained ignorant of all that gives the book vitality. As James observes, conceptual thought “can name the thickness of reality, but it cannot fathom it” (573). Similarly, the knight’s eagerness to determine the appropriate operation to perform *on* the mystic precludes the possibility of direct experience *of* the mystic.

The agential relationship results in injustice to both the agent and the object. The agent is deprived of full

appreciation of the object of his attention. In proceeding toward goals, as James writes, the agent experiences a “deadness toward all but one particular kind of joy” (634) — namely, that of fulfilling the “single specialized vocation” (634) he is captivated by at a given moment. Indeed, the dichotomy between agency and insight is so profound that, as James observes, “it seems almost as if it were necessary to become worthless as a practical being, if one is to hope to attain to any breadth of insight into the impersonal world of worths as such, to have any perception of life’s meaning on a large objective scale” (637).

The object of the agent’s attention is not merely misunderstood. Rather, the object is reduced to an instrument in the agent’s actual or potential decision-making. The agent who perceives truth as residing in “what it is *better for [him]* to believe” (389) fails to engage with that which has no bearing on his interests and goals. To the extent that the agent’s beliefs about his surroundings are influenced by pragmatic concerns about whether “consequences useful to life flow from” his beliefs (461), the agent approaches his surroundings as if they were means. In contrast, the mystic, immersed in “the vast world of inner life beyond [him]” (634) relates to and *participates in* his surroundings as if they were ends.

It is easy to misconstrue James as issuing the rather superficial warning that those who are overly zealous in the pursuit of their goals are apt to exploit their fellow human beings. Certainly, this is the impression left by an essay like “What Makes a Life Significant,” which suggests that “our antipathies and dreads of each other” would evaporate if only we could make ourselves aware of “the nightingale of [life’s] eternal meaning ... singing in all sorts of different men’s hearts” (660). James’s critique, though, extends beyond the obviously exploitative to include the seemingly innocuous enterprise of differentiating between objects, or even between subject and object. As James recognizes, “[t]he subject judged knows a part of the world of reality which the judging spectator fails to see” (630). To the extent that we remain spectator-agents, we are shut out from the reality of the world around us. To partake in this reality, we must engage in the mystical project of becoming co-subjects with our objects. Indeed, from this perspective, to make qualitative statements about objects without engaging in cosubjectivity with them is not only mistaken; it is arrogant. As James writes, “[a]s you sit reading the most moving romance you ever fell upon, what sort of a judge is your fox-terrier of your behavior?” (630). Likewise, what sort of judges of the nature of objects can we be unless we endeavor to share that nature?

It is perhaps easiest to understand the concept of cosubjectivity by approaching it from within the context of interpersonal relationships. As James notes, the lover

realizes his beloved “concretely, and we do not,” for the lover “struggles toward a union with [the beloved’s] inner life, divining her feelings, anticipating her desires [and] understanding her limits” whereas we “are contented that that portion of eternal fact [appearing as the beloved] should be for us as if it were not” (645-46). When we relate to others “in this intense, pathetic, and important way” (646), we internalize them. This is why it is appropriate, in more than a metaphorical way, to say that when a loved one dies we lose a part of ourselves. Nor are such feelings limited to the interpersonal, though this is perhaps where they find their fullest manifestation. It is coherent for me to speak of arranging my living room furniture in a certain way because it is good for my favorite lamp. This does not mean simply that *I* will be happy seeing the lamp in a particular spot in my living room; rather, there is a sense of rightness that applies *to the lamp* when it is in a good place. Likewise, if the lamp shatters, it is not ridiculous for me to feel badly in a way that has nothing to do with the lamp’s instrumental value in making my living room more elegant. It is possible for me to perceive the lamp as an end in itself — as a Thing, the meaning of which is not described by the word “lamp.”

The Bergsonian position is clear: there is “no other way ... to the possession of reality” than “to fall back on raw un verbalized life as [its] revealer” (581). Concepts “cannot even pretend to reveal anything of what life’s inner nature is” (580). The pragmatic method, claiming that “any idea that helps us to deal ... with either the reality or its belongings ... and adapts our life to the reality’s whole setting ... will be true of that reality” (312), is simply wrong. Ideas that help us to deal with reality deserve our attention as agents but are not true *of reality*. There must be, thus, an irreconcilable tension within the reflective agent, for the concepts he must accept if he is to deal with reality he must simultaneously reject if he is to know reality.

James, in a more pragmatic context, had suggested a temporal solution to the problem of the divided agent: “[w]hen weary of the concrete clash and dust and pettiness, he will refresh himself by a bath in the eternal springs, or fortify himself by a look at the immutable natures” (321). A temporal solution, though, is not available for the Bergsonian agent who has realized the non-conceptual nature of reality. Cosubjectivity is not a spiritual luxury, whose frequent absence from our lives can be neutralized if we experience it in large doses on special occasions. Cosubjectivity is simply true, and the agent who acts within a framework of subject-object conceptualizations goes against truth. The individual who recognizes this, but also chooses to exercise his agency, must, *qua* agent, adopt the conceptual view of reality as a working hypothesis. Unlike the scientist who adopts working hypotheses to help him arrive at the truth, however, the Bergsonian agent, if he is to act,

must adopt as a working hypothesis a conceptual scheme that he already knows is *false*.

A kind of consolation can be found for the divided agent in James's observation that "[w]hosever feels his experience to be something substitutional even while he has it, may be said to have an experience that reaches beyond itself. From inside of its own entity it says 'more,' and postulates reality existing elsewhere" (205). Certainly, the wise agent will not lose sight of the reality lying elsewhere even as he utilizes conceptual falsehoods to guide him in activity. Indeed, if the agent can maintain a sense of Reality even while immersed in action, his experience will be greater than if he were to believe that nothing lies beyond the confines of his conceptual framework. As James notes, however, "[n]ot to demand intimate relations with the universe, and not to wish them satisfactory, should be accounted signs of something wrong" (494). It is worth asking how an individual can embrace activity at all, once he is aware of the "higher vision of ... inner significance" (635) that awaits his abandonment of concept-based agency. Having recognized that truth does not reside in the concepts that guide our actions, why are we not paralyzed?

An answer to this question may be found by considering the fate of morality in the face of ethical relativism. If we deny the existence of objective moral truths, it seems as if there is no barrier to amorality. The agent may recognize that conformity to his society's norms is beneficial for his reputation, and that a good reputation is helpful in the pursuit of his goals. The agent cannot, however, claim that "moral" behavior is simply *right*, and is left with the gnawing suspicion that if he could behave immorally without damaging himself prudentially, there would be nothing to constrain him from doing so.

There is no question that ethical relativism undermines our confidence in moral propositions; whatever else we may say on their behalf, we cannot claim that they are true. We may even be powerless to convince the amoralist to abandon his evil ways. This does not, however, mean that, without objective norms to support us, we shall be compelled to become amoralists ourselves. Indeed, we need not invoke truth to endorse the ethical norms that guide our lives if we are convinced that they are integral to the type of life we believe to be best for us.

The analogy between ethical relativism and Bergsonian agency is not complete, however; whereas ethical relativism holds that sentences containing ethical propositions cannot be objectively or ultimately *true*, the Bergsonian holds that sentences employing concepts — that is, *all* sentences — are objectively and ultimately *false*. The analogy to ethical relativism is instructive, though, because it indicates that conformity to truth is not the only standard by which to judge the desirability of a way of life. The extent to which an indi-

vidual's agency is undermined by his awareness that truth is non-conceptual depends on the degree to which the individual prizes truth above agency. James may be right that it is wrong not to demand intimacy with the universe, but this does not mean that it is necessary to demand *total and constant* intimacy. It is perfectly reasonable to strive for increasing intimacy with our loved ones while remaining willing to treat our salads as objects. For such individuals, the Bergsonian revelation need not incapacitate them; rather, it may sensitize them to the possibility of discovering the "essential divinity ... in the fields of vision over which [their] eyes so carelessly pass" (640).

As the preceding argument has indicated, James largely presents the human condition as requiring a choice *between* agency and mystical awareness. The individual who "dive[s] ... into the flux itself," James writes, engages in "a kind of passive ... listening quite contrary to that effort to react noisily and verbally on everything, which is our usual intellectual pose" (573). "Had we no concepts," however, James argues that "we should live simply 'getting' each successive moment of experience, as the sessile sea-anemone on its rock receives whatever nourishment the wash of the waves may bring" (239). It seems as if the mystic must abdicate agency entirely, and we can reasonably wonder how such a life could be viable. I would like to conclude this essay by suggesting that the quest for intimacy with Reality prevents the mystic from acting as an individually distinct Agent, but does not put an end to his activity. Cosubjectivity implies coagency. This is commonly experienced in intimate interpersonal relationships. A husband and wife, when fully sensitive to each other, do not act as separate individuals who are in convenient agreement. They act *as a unit*. We can imagine the mystical experience if we expand the concept of coagency to include the entirety of the universe. Whereas the typical, concept-oriented agent acts upon his surroundings as a distinct individual, the mystic, in concert with the universe as a whole, simply acts.²

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² I would like to express my gratitude to Richard Gale, whose supportive encouragement and perceptive criticisms contributed much to the writing and revision of this essay.

Closer to the Threshold: Kagan, Temperament, and WJ's Varieties

by Lynn Bridgers

I. Introduction

For almost a century ideas that William James proposed on the origin of emotion were dismissed. Walter Cannon's 1927 critique of James's theory posed the hypothalamus as the source of the emotions, while James suggested they originated in the body (1890a). It wasn't until the 1980s, when the role of peptides and receptor sites came to light, that the scientific community began to recognize emotions originate in both (Pert, 135-137). Similarly, many have dismissed James's conversion typology, set forth in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). John Locke's *tabula rasa* was widely accepted and human infants seen as uniform blank slates for the script of experience. But recent work by Harvard psychologist Jerome Kagan poses serious challenges to the idea of uniformity in infants and is renewing interest in the role of temperament in human nature. The variations in temperament Kagan has observed and recorded seem to curiously echo the conversion types presented by James in *Varieties*. Could the work of Jerome Kagan be contemporary support for James's typology?

II. Kagan's Temperament Studies

There is nothing new about the idea that our reactions are shaped by in-born temperament. Galen, a second-century physician from Asia Minor, proposed a complex system of nine temperaments. Today's researchers define temperament somewhat differently. According to Kagan, "the concept of temperament refers to any moderately stable, differentiating emotional or behavioral quality whose appearance in childhood is influenced by an inherited biology, including differences in brain neurochemistry" (xvii). His research focuses on only two of these inherited qualities, the *inhibited* and *uninhibited*, or "cautious compared with the bold child" (xvii).

Four decades ago, Alexander Thomas and Stella Chess suggested that infants differ in temperament. Kagan's own work began in 1957. To minimize genetic and socio-economic variables, he studied a group of eighty-nine Caucasian children. The findings? "Children who had been extremely fearful during the first three years had retained some derivatives of that quality through adolescence and adulthood" (114).

Kagan works at the intersection of physiology and psychology. Accordingly, he incorporates both the use of standard psychological instruments and the measurement of physiological variables. Psychological dimensions studied center around response to the unfamiliar – how individuals react to unfamiliar situations. Physiological changes associated with these situations include activation of the sympathetic nervous system – heart rate, blood pressure, pupillary dilation, and muscle tension – and changes associated with the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. HPA axis changes include increases in epinephrine, which has an excitatory effect, and an increase in cortisol, associated with stress response (143). Inhibited children demonstrated different levels of heart rate acceleration and a high level of excitability in both the amygdala and the systems it controls. Collectively, these indicators suggest "inhibited children possess a more reactive sympathetic system" (149).

Kagan's research has also found a smaller subset of inhibited children whose reactivity was markedly different. He makes a distinction between the ease with which a child is aroused and the quality of that arousal, creating four categorical groups. This categorical approach "assumes that the four reactive groups that we posited...inherited qualitatively different neuro-chemistries" (277). The ease with which a child reacts is measured as high or low reactivity. The quality of that reaction is measured as distress or arousal. Findings on these four types are summarized in the table replicated below from Kagan's book *Galen's Prophecy*.

Table 6.1 The Four Reactive Types
(Replicated from Jerome Kagan, *Galen's Prophecy: Temperament in Human Nature*, New York: Basic Books, 1998, p. 176.)

Type	Percent of Sample	Motor	Fret/Cry
High Reactive	20	High	High
Low Reactive	40	Low	Low
Distressed	25	Low	High
Aroused	10	High	Low

Kagan is statistically too careful to make sweeping statements, but does give some overview percentages of his findings in his reflections at the end of *Galen's Prophecy*. "About two of every ten healthy Caucasian infants inherit a physiology that biases them to be both aroused and distressed by stimulation early in the first year and initially avoidant of unfamiliarity in the second and third years. About four of ten infants inherit a physiology that permits them to be relaxed at four months and relatively fearless in early childhood" (261).

Temperament is a profile that emerges from several factors. It is disposition, not destiny. Children inherit a certain temperamental disposition, which interacts with experience to produce different, relatively stable temperamental profiles. To chart this stability, Kagan uses a four-month old baseline behavioral profile and supplements it with documented fear responses at nine, fourteen, and twenty-one months (177, 182). Highly reactive infants remained most fearful at each age. Low reactors retain lower reactivity at each age. Kagan associates highly-reactive profiles with the nineteenth century diagnosis of neurasthenia, and with the current diagnostic category of generalized anxiety disorder (289).

The idea that inherited disposition fosters the development of certain temperamental profiles challenges some of our most dearly held convictions. Given the premium we set on autonomy and control in our culture, is it any wonder we are uncomfortable with the conception that aspects of our intimate daily lives may be beyond our control? Kagan suggests "a small number of individuals possess a central nervous system that creates feeling states that cannot be controlled. Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and William James experienced dark moods that they tried unsuccessfully to subdue. In their cases, will lost to temperament" (297). Did William James's own long periods of "dysphoria," his own history of "dark moods," inform an intuitive understanding of temperament? Does Kagan's work support James's own?

III. Temperament in William James's Varieties

James believed that temperament played a large part in our moral life and our general outlook on life. As early as 1891, he wrote "the deepest difference, practically, in the moral life of man is the difference between the easy-going and the strenuous mood" (1891, 615). His conviction that temperamental biases played some part in "mental make-up" stayed with him. In 1907, writing in *Pragmatism*, James makes a "temperamental" distinction between the tender-minded and the tough-minded (1907, 491). But clearly his best-known and most well-developed treatment of tempera-

ment is his 1902 classic, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. So imbedded is James's religious typology in the work, one could consider the entire book a series of reflections on the implications of temperament for religious experience. Here, the "easy-going" and "strenuous mood" are presented as the "healthy-minded" and the "sick-souled." The distinction between the two becomes critical not only for understanding James's views of religious experience, but for understanding how Kagan's work supports and amplifies James's.

First, note that both of these thinkers who focus so much of their attention on temperament begin by emphasizing not the ethereal but the bodily. Kagan reminds us "contrasting descriptions of the psychological and physiological processes that affect behavior are like the alternative perceptions of the drawing of the vase-faces illustrated in most psychology textbooks" (xix). In other words recognizing physical or psychological as primary is basically a function of attention, another concept that James would heartily support (1890b). James, in turn, begins his treatise on religious experience with a lecture entitled "Religion and Neurology," stating he will draw his work from *documents humains*, "the documents that will most concern us will be those of the men [and women] who were most accomplished in the religious life" (3). James, trained in the biological sciences, will retain a certain scientific cast to his study of diverse phenomenon, but he is careful to clarify his use of medical perspectives in the first lecture. First of all, James makes clear, spiritual experience cannot be *reduced* to mere biology. He discards the reductionist approach which he terms "medical materialism" (1902, 13). His own criterion comes later in the lecture. "In other words, not its origin, but *the way in which it works on the whole...*this is our own empiricist criterion" (1902, 20). James will judge by the fruits.

The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness

James tells his listeners, "I may succeed in discussing religious experiences in a wider context than has been usual in university courses" (1902, 25). The need for breadth and scope leads him to present a perspective rarely noted as his first type of religious temperament, "the religion of the healthy-minded" (1902, 78). By healthy-minded, James means "those, who, when unhappiness is offered or proposed to them, positively refuse to feel it, as if it were something mean and wrong. We find such persons in every age, passionately flinging themselves upon their sense of the goodness of life, in spite of the hardships of their own condition, and in spite of the sinister theologies into which they may be born" (1902, 79).

James specifically identifies this kind of consistent

optimism as a physiologically based temperament. Discussing Edward Everett Hale, he notes, "one can but recognize in such writers as these the presence of a temperament organically weighted on the side of cheer and fatally forbidden to linger, as those of opposite temperament linger, over the darker aspects of the universe" (1902, 83). In fact, in some individuals, "the capacity for even a transient sadness or a momentary humility seems cut off from them as by a kind of congenital anaesthesia" (1902, 83). James is also careful to distinguish between involuntary compulsion toward happiness and voluntary choice, making a distinction between consistently "feeling" happy and the deliberate "conception" of something as good. The conception of something as good – the systematic cultivation of healthy-mindedness – James applauds, but warns that in its extremity it can take the form of organized religious groups demanding optimism from their members. These James terms the "Mind-cure movement." He includes Emersonianism, New England transcendentalism, and Berkeleyan idealism in that group. We might add Christian Science, Scientology, or certain New Age philosophies.

In Kagan's research, James's healthy-minded correlate to the uninhibited child. Kagan notes "about two in five infants inherit a bias that favors a relaxed, minimally distressed reaction to stimulation" (xix). These infants, which Kagan terms *low reactive*, rarely fretted or cried, were more likely to smile and to make vocal sounds. When retested at nine, fourteen and twenty-one months, these responses remained constant. "High reactive infants smiled much less often than the other three groups; low reactive and aroused infants smiled the most often" (Kagan, 199).

These individuals whose reactivity is lower also have a greater talent for happiness, so to speak. They tend to smile more readily, more often, and more easily. "The difference between the two groups in spontaneous smiling was more striking. Uninhibited children smiled as they greeted the examiner, and many smiled as they failed a difficult test item, as if they were laughing at themselves" (Kagan, 135). Kagan also assigns them a kind of "congenital happiness," even when they do become aroused. "Low reactive children...do not become aroused easily. On those occasions when they do, about 15 percent are biased to assume a state we might call unusually happy or joyful" (235). Later testing indicated that this cohort tended to socialize more easily, to be bolder and more confident. All are attributes that one can tie to James's "temperament organically weighted on the side of cheer" (1902, 83). Kagan's research appears to support the division of the healthy-minded in James's typology and to place their numbers, at least in the population Kagan studied, at about forty percent.

If James's religion of healthy-mindedness is supported by Kagan's research, does his research also support James's other types? Opening his next lecture, James reminds us:

At our last meeting we considered the healthy-minded temperament, the temperament which has a constitutional incapacity for prolonged suffering, and in which the tendency to see things optimistically is like a water of crystallization in which the individual's character is set. We saw how this temperament may become the basis for a peculiar type of religion, a religion in which good, even the good of this world's life, is regarded as the essential thing for a rational being to attend to (1902, 127).

Now James leads us to the darker side of human nature, the "sick souled." But before mapping the shadow world, he draws heavily on the language of temperament, right down to the melancholic and sanguine language proposed by Galen in the second century.

He first introduces the idea of threshold, "a symbolic designation for the point at which one state of mind passes in to another," then relates threshold to temperament. "The sanguine and healthy-minded live habitually on the sunny side of their misery-line, the depressed and the melancholy live beyond it, in darkness and apprehension" (1902, 135). James echoes elements in Kagan's study – arousal, irritability and reactivity. He writes, "There are men who seem to have started in life with a bottle or two of champagne inscribed to their credit; whilst others seem to have been born close to the pain-threshold, which the slightest irritants fatally send them over" (1902, 135). For those on the dark side of the pain-threshold "life and its negation are beaten up inextricably together" (1902, 139). They are mired in a world that offers happiness, but offers its negation at the same time. Everyday, "the evil background is really there to be thought of, and the skull will grin in at the banquet" (1902, 141). The sick soul will be constantly aware of the darkness in every corner, and unable to shake off the implications of the skull's perennial smile. Good becomes difficult to accept or attend to.

James introduces the possibility of a neurotic fixation that might take the form of religious melancholy, suggesting that the sensitivity of the sick-souled individual may make necessary a divided hierarchy within the self, a tiered system of impulses subordinated to necessity and social demand. In the religiously minded, this division can become "a battle-ground for what he feels to be two deadly hostile selves, one actual, the other ideal" (1902, 171). When the will is

divided, the self is divided and the division provides “that touch of explosive intensity, of dynamogenic quality ...that enables them to burst their shell, and make irruption efficaciously into life and quell the lower tendencies forever” (1902, 173). In other words, the divided self will create a need for unification, and this need for unification can be very instructive for understanding religious experience. But this process of unification can take numerous forms. “It may come gradually, or it may come abruptly; it may come through altered feelings, or through altered powers of action, or it may come through new intellectual insights, or through experience which we shall later have to designate as ‘mystical’” (1902, 175).

Studying this division and the need for unification that it creates, James proposes two subdivisions within the shadow world of the sick-souled. “The older medicine used to speak of two ways, *lysis and crisis*, one gradual, the other abrupt, in which one might recover from a bodily disease,” he informs us. The same is true in the spiritual realm. “In the spiritual realm there are also two ways, one gradual, the other sudden, in which inner unification may occur” (1902, 183).

James is clear about his definition of conversion. It is important to know how he understands conversion before one can begin to understand the implications of temperament for his conversion typology. In the beginning of Lecture X, James defines conversion as “the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities” (1902, 189). Thus for James, conversion is fundamentally a process of unification that results in observable impact.

There is a second important element, and it involves the means by which such unification occurs. James posits a center of consciousness, what he terms “the habitual center of personal energy,” or the “the group of ideas to which he devotes himself” (1902, 196). This idea of a habitual center suggests a center and a periphery, a gradation in terms of value. James can then expand on his definition of conversion. “To say that a man is ‘converted’ means, in these terms, that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy” (1902, 196).

Volitional Conversion

The first subset of the sick souled that James addresses is the gradual and volitional unification of self, a gradual shift between periphery and center. Both Leo Tolstoy and John Bunyan serve as examples of this reaction, where “sadness was preserved as a

minor ingredient in the heart of the faith by which it was overcome” (1902, 187). These individuals did not lose their temperamental inclination to anxiety or sadness, merely found “an excitement, a faith, a force that re-infuses the positive willingness to live, even in the full presence of the evil perceptions” (1902, 187).

There is a quiet, sad attentiveness in the sick-souled folk who follow James’s pattern of volitional or gradual conversion that is reminiscent of Kagan’s inhibited type. Included in Kagan’s research are interviews and descriptions offered by the children’s parents. One mother’s description captures both the quiet attentiveness of James’s volitional convert and what Kagan terms “the essential characteristics of this [the inhibited] temperamental category” (139).

If something is new and different, his inclination is to be quiet and watch. He is aware of this and has compensating and coping strategies. His friends do not see him as shy. It’s unfamiliarity that is the cause of his behavior, not only unfamiliar people – it has to do with newness (quoted in Kagan, 139).

Kagan suggests that this attentiveness to the unfamiliar and the predisposition for anxiety may have an impact on the moral formation of inhibited children. “All children come to realize that they will feel discomfort when they anticipate punishment for actions that others disapprove,” Kagan reminds us. “For inhibited children, whose physiology makes them especially vulnerable to this uncertainty, expectation of punishment or criticism may be particularly aversive. As a result, they should be expected to avoid acting in ways that will provoke these emotions” (239). This means the inhibited child is more likely to adopt standards that are less permissive, particularly in terms of moral error. Kagan has documented support for this. Studies have shown higher rates of fearfulness in children who achieved bladder control early, for example.

The consistently reinforced anticipation of punishment, the distaste for uncertainty, and systematic avoidance of situations that provoke uncomfortable feeling states, would be in keeping with the volitional types described by James, and his student E. D. Starbuck. “In the volitional type,” James emphasizes, “the regenerative change is usually gradual, and consists in the building up, piece by piece, of a new set of moral and spiritual habits” (1902, 206). But if the inhibited child could be linked to volitional conversion, where in Kagan’s work do we find support for the more dramatic form of conversion that so intrigued James? Where do we find temperamental differences that might relate to the abrupt conversion process?

Abrupt Conversion

Incorporating the work of Starbuck, James explains, "When the new centre of personal energy has been subconsciously incubated so long as to be ready to open into flower, 'hands off' is the only word for us, it must burst forth unaided!" (1902, 210). It bursts forth in an abrupt conversion experience, and while these abrupt conversions may be somewhat less common than slower, volitional forms, they are not insignificant. As to the mechanics, James suggests abrupt conversion has to do with the force of overpowering affections. When overwhelmed by worry or anger, we can either be overwhelmed by its opposite, or "by getting so exhausted with the struggle that we have to stop – so we drop down, give up and *don't care* any longer" (1902, 212). This is significant, James suggests, because "there is documentary proof that this state of temporary exhaustion not infrequently forms part of the conversion crisis" (212).

But could this tendency to be "overwhelmed" by emotion and the subsequent surrender also be tied to temperament? Kagan distinguishes between two kinds of fear in his research. One type was distress and one type was avoidant. High reactive infants were most vulnerable to both kinds of fear reactions (187). This may reflect physiological differences in high reactors. In the amygdala, two different bundles of nerves mediate responses to novelty – one leads to avoidance and one to distress. In high reactors both bundles are activated simultaneously. The response of highly reactive infants, like those of the panic attack, "may reflect a special physiological state, not just a level of fear that is more intense" (188).

The combined distress/avoidant response carries a price over time. "High reactive infants become dour, serious, and fearful as they grow, while low reactors become more joyful and fearless as they mature" (Kagan, 201). Kagan suggests that inhibited, and particularly highly reactive children, may be more prone to anxiety. He is also quick to point out the importance of addressing anxiety in the work of several influential religious thinkers. "The commentaries on human nature by Martin Luther and John Calvin emphasize the anxiety, fear, and guilt that is endemic to the human condition and the extraordinary effort necessary to control these gnawing unpleasant emotions" (Kagan, 256).

But why might these high reactors evidence a greater propensity for abrupt conversion? James offers one possible explanation. James is clear that he considered the most important step forward in psychology in his time was the discovery "in certain subjects at least, there is not only the consciousness of the ordinary field, with its usual centre and margin, but an addition thereto in the shape of a set of memories, thoughts,

and feelings which are extra-marginal and outside of the primary consciousness altogether" (1902, 233). James knew the work of Janet, Breuer, and Freud, emphasizing the subliminal consciousness of hysteric patients, and "whole systems of underground life, in the shape of memories of a painful sort which lead a parasitic existence, buried outside the primary fields of consciousness" (1902, 235). This seemed to be the key to abrupt conversion. According to James, "in the recipient of the more instantaneous grace we have one of those Subjects who are in possession of a large region in which mental work can go on subliminally, and from which invasive experience, abruptly upsetting the equilibrium of the primary consciousness, may come" (1902, 237).

James bases his own temperamental conclusions, in part, on the work of George A. Coe. Coe found that sudden transformations were associated with pronounced emotional sensitivity, automatisms or activities indicative of a large extra-marginal field of consciousness, and with suggestibility of a passive type (1902, 241). Both James's extramarginal field and Coe's emotional sensitivity could be attributed to high reactors. As we learned above, in the inhibited child, "physiology makes them especially vulnerable to this uncertainty" and "expectation of punishment or criticism may be particularly aversive" (Kagan, 239). This is particularly true of high reactors. "Reactions to the examiner's chastisements imply that inhibited children are more vulnerable to uncertainty following adult disapproval. It is not surprising therefore, that the mothers of high reactive infants were likely to report that their children were unusually sensitive to punishment both at home and in day care settings" (Kagan, 240). More sensitive – one could say more suggestible – and if by hesitantly avoiding experiences that combined unpleasant interior avoidance and fear responses, one could also say more passive. James, Coe, Starbuck and Kagan would all seem to be in agreement.

The link between James's abrupt conversions and high reactors could be established in terms of James's extra-marginal field as well. Kagan has done considerable work documenting changes in sympathetic physiology in high reactors, who live in more reactive physical states with greater sensitivity to change and fear. This is significant. Elmer Green, pioneer of the use of biofeedback for disease, reminds us of the solid ties between physiological awareness and the unconscious. "If a certain kind of body consciousness is developed – if one can become conscious in normally unconscious parts of the body, at will – then a large number of problems that afflict bodies begin to come under control" (Green, 1977, 156). This awareness, Green explains, supports "the idea that body consciousness is an essential ingredient in becoming aware of certain normally unconscious processes"

(156). While the precise relationship between physiological states and unconscious permeability is not clear, research on enzymes, peptides and other neurohormonal systems has led physiologist and biophysicist Candace Pert to conclude “the body is the unconscious mind!” (141). From this perspective, the cumulative impact of years of higher states of reactivity, stored on both conscious and unconscious levels, could foster the development of a “large region in which mental work can go on subliminally” (James, 237). Over time, high reactors could develop a larger and potentially more accessible “extra-marginal field.” And it is from the contents of this field that “invasive experience, abruptly upsetting the equilibrium of the primary consciousness, may come” (James, 237). High reactors very physical reactivity could predispose them to such invasive experiences, and to correspondingly abrupt conversion experiences.

IV. Conclusion

James’s idea that certain inborn temperaments express themselves in varying dispositions to religious experience would tend to be supported by Kagan’s research. Specifically, Kagan’s work could provide a framework for channeling newer biologically based research into a better understanding of the variations in religious experience that James recognized and documented. Kagan also suggests connections between temperamental dispositions and the promises of the ideal in various religious traditions, explicitly considering this in terms of Martin Luther and John Calvin. James makes a similar move when he shifts from his discussion of conversion to the value of saintliness. Both authors suggest that certain temperamental profiles can be linked to the lives of religious innovators, to those most intriguing *documents humains*. James said from the onset, “the documents that will most concern us will be those of the men [and women] who were most accomplished in the religious life” (1902, 3). Those who were most accomplished were not necessarily the most cheerful.

Still, we hesitate to consign high reactors to unhappy lives. If happiness is “simply a gift of nature...surely there is injustice” (Kagan, 290). But that injustice is tempered by the legacy that the abrupt conversions of spiritual innovators leave in terms of religious thought, by the enduring maps that they provide of interior landscapes. After all, as James is quick to remind us, “the best fruits of religious experience are the best things that history has to show” (1902, 259). But better understanding of the relationship between conversion and temperament could mean a more generous response to all of the varieties of religious experience, including those religious innovators

who, throughout history, have been so consistently generous with us. Evelyn Underhill understood that the life that follows such an abrupt conversion “is not a static condition; often it coexists with that travail of the heart which Tauler has called ‘stormy love’” (265). For even the most powerful abrupt conversion is only the beginning of a much longer journey, one in which “the progress of illumination is a progressive consciousness that is destined not for the sunny shores of a spiritual universe, but for ‘the vast and stormy sea of the divine’” (265).

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WJ’s Dog, Rylie (1904)