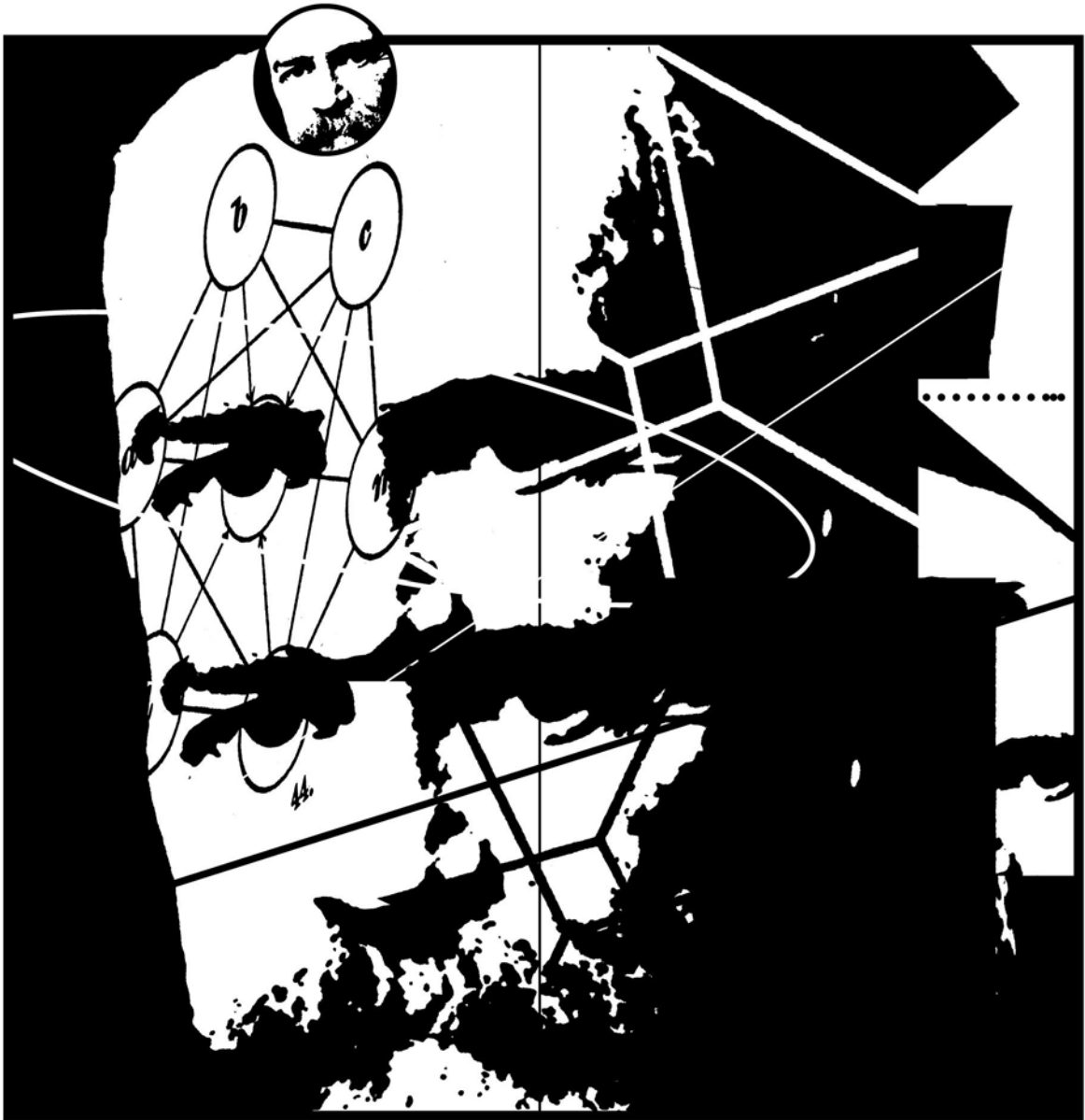


*Streams
of
William James*

*A Publication of the William James Society
Volume 4 • Issue 1 • Spring 2002*



Imagery by Roy R. Behrens <ballast@netins.net>

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"The purpose of the William James Society shall be to encourage study of, and communication about, the life and work of William James (1842-1910) and his ongoing influence in the many fields to which he contributed."

—Article I,
William James Society Constitution

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2001 Support

The William James Society gratefully acknowledges the following institution and individuals for their support in 2001:

**Oklahoma State University,
Department of Philosophy**
Publication and mailing costs for
Streams of William James

Beacon Helper (\$250)

Anonymous
E. Diane Fink

Friend of William James (\$150)

Anonymous
Anonymous
Eugene Fontinell
Peter H. Hare
Roberta Sheehan

Supporting Star (\$75)

Anonymous
H. Parker James
Michael James

Note: The William James Society is a charitable organization under 501(c) (3) of the Federal Tax Code.

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www.pragmatism.org/societies/william_james.htm

Randall H. Albright • Editor • *Streams of William James* •
423 Marlborough Street • Boston, MA 02115-1209 • USA

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

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Macedonio's WJ Photograph

On September, 18, 2001, Jaime Nubiola, who authored a paper on William James and Macedonio Fernandez (*Streams of William James*, Vol. 3, #3, pp. 14-15), visited Adolfo de Obieta in Buenos Aires. Obieta, who is 89 years old, keeps a photograph sent by William James to his father Macedonio Fernandez, and gave his authorization to reproduce it in *Streams*.

In that interview Obieta remembered how his father Macedonio used to bring a bundle of treasured documents in his pocket, including a photograph of his mother and a fragment of a letter from James. That piece of letter was lost. Now the only remaining physical evidence of Macedonio's relation with James is this signed photograph. In the back it appears that Macedonio's address was written with a different hand.

Edinburgh Conference on William James

An international and interdisciplinary centenary conference in celebration of the 1901-1902 Gifford Lectures by William James will be held at the Old College, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom, July 5 through 7, 2002. A day workshop and contributed papers will follow on July 8, 2002.

Eugene Taylor is the keynote speaker. Papers from international scholars in the fields of philosophy, psychology, and religion include Jacob Belzen, Richard Gale, Grace Jantzen, Richard King, David Lamberth, Peggy Morgan, Ruth Anna Putnam, Sonu Shamdasani, Robert Segal, and Michel Weber.

The conference will include a reception and launch a special centenary edition of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* with new introductions by Eugene Taylor and Jeremy Carrett, published by Routledge, Taylor & Francis.

For further details, conference program, and paper submissions for the Monday session, please contact:

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Am	Will	I
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I	Am	Will

Choose Your Way

by Renato R. Kinouchi

“Their Facts Are Patent And Startling”: WJ and Mental Healing (Part One)

by John T. Matteson

There is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision.

—William James, *The Principles of Psychology*

If one were to judge solely from William James’s private correspondence, one might well conclude that James had little patience with the mind-cure movements that proliferated in the United States during the late nineteenth century. James was particularly harsh in his pronouncements against the most prominent and durable of these movements, Christian Science, and its founder, Mary Baker Eddy. In a letter to James Rowland Angell, James declared his judgment that, “Of course, the Eddy school are intellectually absurd.”¹ He took an even less generous view of Mrs. Eddy herself, complaining to Wincenty Lutoslawski that “Mrs. Eddy personally is a rapacious humbug.”² Such private statements, however, were curiously at odds with James’s behavior toward Christian Science, both in his capacity as a public lecturer and advocate and in his personal struggles to achieve physical health. James’s endorsement of healthy-minded religiosity in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is only the best known of James’s public statements in apparent sympathy with mind-cure in general. Less commonly remembered now, though notorious in medical circles at the time, was James’s appearance before the Massachusetts State legislature to oppose a regulatory plan that, if enacted, threatened to drive Christian Science practice out of the Commonwealth. Moreover, despite his dismissals of Christian Science in his private letters, James is known to have sought the services of Christian Science practitioners on numerous occasions, seeking cures for ailments ranging from depression to angina pectoris.

Men and women are revealed more strikingly by their contradictions than in their consistencies. In James’s struggle between his clear frustration with the logical improbabilities of the mind-cure movement and his unwillingness to dismiss any belief that might improve an individual life, one observes three different

attitudes contending for ascendancy in a single man. In his public speeches and writings, James addresses mind-cure with an extremely open mind, urging broad tolerance for religious healers and suggesting that such practitioners have much to teach the proponents of conventional medicine. In much of James’s personal correspondence, however, a different voice predominates: skeptical in outlook, acerbic in tone, and almost wholly dismissive of Christian Science in particular. Finally, in private conduct, a third James emerges, one who habitually pursued mind-cure treatments in search of renewed health. This essay proposes not only to discuss James’s public stance toward mind-cure, but also to explore the feelings on the subject that he did not willingly expose to his readers and listeners. It will illustrate that James’s ambivalent attitude toward Christian Science and other movements of mental healing was rooted not only in his mature pragmatic philosophy but also in the nature of his upbringing and the contradictions of his character.

I. Father and Son: The Roots of James’s Defense of Mental Healing

The question of how James could both privately deride Christian Science and publicly defend it at potential cost to his own reputation may be answered in part by the practical and intellectual influences of his father, Henry James, Sr. Henry’s determined but bungling attempts to find the best possible education for his sons have been thoroughly examined elsewhere.³ William claimed that his father’s fitfully shifting him from one educational environment to another had no other effect than producing “a miserable, home-bred, obscure little ignoramus.”⁴ They also impressed upon William a pattern of impermanence and indeterminacy. Henry’s eternal searching and restlessness led his son to assume that there are no final, enduring solutions to life’s problems and that, when one embraces one option, one does so at the tremendous cost of foregoing all others. The mutability of young William’s living and educational arrangements helped to foster in him an inexhaustible openness to new and unlikely possibilities. But at the same time that it opened his mind, the rootlessness of his early years established for him a lifelong habit of indecisiveness. As Louis Menand has aptly noted, James “thought that certainty was moral death, and he hated to foreclose anything.”⁵

1. William James, “To James Rowland Angell,” 4 October 1900, in *Selected Unpublished Correspondence, 1885-1910*, ed. Frederick J. Down Scott (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1986), p. 237.

2. William James, “To Wincenty Lutoslawski,” 2 March 1904, in *Selected Unpublished Correspondence, 1885-1910*, p. 338. The use of “Mrs. Eddy” in this article is not intended to be sexist. I defer to her devotees, who refer to her in this way.

3. See, for instance, Gay Wilson Allen, *William James: A Biography* (New York: Viking 1967), pp. 32-63, and Howard M. Feinstein, *Becoming William James* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1984), pp. 103-168.

4. William James, *The Letters of William James*, ed. Henry James (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920), I, p. 12. Cited hereinafter as *Letters*.

5. Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), p. 75.

As Howard Feinstein has shown, William's youth taught him a number of lessons: first, practical solutions tend only to be temporary; second, one can win affection, attention, and other benefits by the manipulation of illness; and finally, one may make a pursuit respectable in the eyes of the world by couching it in terms of scientific inquiry. In his frequent trips to therapeutic spas and in his series of eagerly embraced and disappointedly abandoned cures, James gradually accustomed himself to a pattern of thinking and conduct that he followed in one form or another until the end of his life. He became an inveterate seeker of remedies and, at the same time, a deeply skeptical critic of them. Every new treatment reinforced his felt need for more treatment. Every failure reinforced his suspicion that no therapy would actually work. Year by year, William James became a connoisseur of systems and stratagems for battling illness, ennui, and the blues. Many of the therapeutic regimens he tried out were frowned upon by respectable medicine, and James himself did not entirely believe in any of them. Curiously, though, he was unable to put aside the notion that one of them might, against all likelihood and informed opinion, prove to be the answer. So, too, with mental healing; James found it impossible either to reject mind-cure or to embrace it with the enthusiasm that might have permitted it to do him some good.

Two years after the death of his father, William produced a tribute to him by publishing, at his own expense, a collection of the deceased man's writings, which William titled, *The Literary Remains of the Late Henry James*. It was not unusual at the time for memorial editions to include the words "literary remains" in their titles. In the case of James, however, the words were laden with significance, suggesting a desire both to bury the father and to keep him present. The title transmutes the writings of the father into carrion, but their publication in durable form preserves them and makes them visible; a new life is given them even as their mortality is acknowledged. William's dual impulse to proclaim the death of his father's ideas and simultaneously to retain them extends beyond the title. William's introduction to the book also treads the line between life and death. Henry's views are described as "vital," in contrast to "the altogether lifeless" character of other contemporary theisms.⁶ The good self is extolled as a "generous receptacle of life"; the less appealing side of human character, the "usurping jealous *me*" is denounced as "cadaverous."⁷ In James's emphasis on the living quality of his father's ideas, one observes the genesis of a theme that would appear time and again in James's later writings: what mattered about an idea was not its objective truth – a concept William James doubted anyway – but rather its

ability to stir lively thought among those with whom it made contact. Although James criticized his father's writings as intellectually unsatisfying, he lauded their conception of God as being "warm and living and dramatic enough to speak to the heart of the common pluralistic man."⁸

The son's desire to honor the father's legacy while disavowing it reflects James's ambivalence toward his father as a thinker. William saw in the elder Henry both great idealism and much practical absurdity. As much as he felt an intellectual obligation to criticize his father's ideas, he felt a commensurate personal duty not to discredit them entirely. In his introduction to *Literary Remains*, William writes of his father, "His truths were his life."⁹ The logical extension of this idea is that whoever murders Henry's ideas strikes fatally at Henry as well. However little William thought of the logic of his father's arguments, he could not bring himself to commit intellectual parricide.

William James could not have failed to hear some harmonies when the chords of Christian Science and his father's work were sounded together. Many of the core ideas of Mrs. Eddy's philosophy were not so very far from the truths that made up the life of the elder James. As Louis Menand has recently written, the main pillars of Henry Sr.'s thought included a "monistic belief in the unchanging reality of an unseen world," and disbelief in the self-centered individual, both tenets on which Mary Baker Eddy also insisted.¹⁰ Readers familiar with the writings of Mrs. Eddy will see in the following passage, taken from the collection of Henry Sr.'s writings edited by William James, much that savors of Christian Science doctrine:

Viewed by the light of our own day, the sole veritable rule of the divine kingdom, whether on earth or in heaven, is freedom, not force; and there is no possible antagonism, but only the fullest harmony, between the divine and human natures; for in truth the nature of man is *literally* divine, and it is only his person which has ever had any valid right to esteem itself undivine.¹¹

6. William James, "Introduction," *The Literary Remains of the Late Henry James* (New York: Houghton, 1884), p. 12. Cited hereinafter as *Literary Remains*.

7. *Literary Remains*, p. 25.

8. *Literary Remains*, p. 115.

9. *Literary Remains*, p. 10.

10. Menand, p. 88. It is tempting to see Christian Science as a descendant of the Transcendentalism that absorbed the senior James's generation. Such a link has been observed by Stephen Gottschalk in *The Emergence of Christian Science in American Religious Life* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1973), p. 278. Caroline Fraser has described Mrs. Eddy's work as "an unconscious misreading of Emerson." *God's Perfect Child: Living and Dying in the Christian Science Church* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999), p. 63. However, Mrs. Eddy herself was critical of Emerson, accusing him of using "so much reason...that he lost the true sense of Spirit." Gottschalk, p. 51. Because they maintain that their founder's inspirations were divine, not human, Christian Scientists tend not to acknowledge the Transcendentalist connection.

In the same work, the elder James expounded his belief that the physical body offered a mere illusion of human identity. True “man” was a creature of holy spirit, not mortal flesh:

I do not believe that universal man is at all identical with time and space limitations (or bodily organization); and I deny, therefore, that bodily or space and time limitations are competent to alienate *him* from God, or give him a conscious otherness to God....Man universal in fact is without body...his body being spiritual.¹²

Henry James, Sr., had a powerful personal motivation for refusing to emphasize the physical nature of human beings. As a young adolescent, while attempting to stamp out a fire, he had suffered burns that led to the amputation of one of his legs. As a physical creature, Henry Sr. could never consider himself whole. However, by defining himself in spiritual terms, he escaped the sense of limitation and incompleteness that otherwise confronted him every day. Henry Sr. certainly would have read with interest the following declaration of Mrs. Eddy to the effect that the body does not constitute man: “If the real man is in the material body, you take away a portion of the man when you amputate a limb.... But the loss of a limb or injury to a tissue is sometimes the quickener of manliness; and the unfortunate cripple may present more nobility than the statuesque athlete.”¹³ James himself put the proposition barely and succinctly: “[M]en’s bodies are not themselves.”¹⁴ “Otherness to God,” he announced with an adjective that strongly presaged Mrs. Eddy, was “unscientific.”¹⁵ Henry, Sr., was, it appears, saying nothing very different from what Mary Baker Eddy was to affirm in *Science and Health*: “Man is not matter....Man is spiritual and perfect.... Man is the idea, the image, of Love; he is not physique. He ... has no separate mind from God.”¹⁶ Mrs. Eddy’s fundamental credo is her “Scientific Statement of Being,” a recitation that Christian Scientist children still learn along with their Lord’s Prayer. It states in part, “Spirit is the real and eternal; matter is the unreal and temporal....Therefore, man is not material; he is spiritual.”¹⁷ One of the strongest influences on the elder Henry was exerted by his English friend, Garth Wilkinson, a Swedenborgian for whom James named his third son. Interestingly, Wilkinson expressed the hope of one day using Swedenborg’s teachings to establish a philosophy he intended to call

“Christian Science.”¹⁸

William James owed no blood loyalty to Mary Baker Eddy and the other proponents of religious healing. Nevertheless, it would have been impossible for James to fail to recognize the many points at which the philosophies of his father and the most famous proponent of religious healing appeared to intersect. So many of their core ideas were so nearly identical that he would have been hard pressed to disapprove of Christian Science without also disowning his father’s views. Indeed, that James did recognize the ideological connection is strongly suggested by the unusual adjective he used to describe both his father’s work and the work of the mind-curers. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James was to discuss mind-cure as part of the religion of “healthy-mindedness.” James first used the term “healthy-minded” to describe religious experience in his introduction to his father’s *Literary Remains*.¹⁹ Intellectual consistency demanded that, if William James were to remain generously disposed toward his father’s brand of healthy-mindedness, he would have to accord equal dignity to other members of the same philosophical genus.

Near the end of his introduction to *Literary Remains*, James asked his father’s readers to appeal the quality of his father’s doctrines to the “umpire of practice,” that is, to judge them, not by the strength of their formal logic or scholarship but by their subjective capacity to produce useful effects. The test of his father’s philosophy—or of any philosophy—was whether it proved “the most serviceable to man’s life.”²⁰ James summed up his admonition with the biblical injunction, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” Not surprisingly, Mary Baker Eddy used the same words as an epigram to the final chapter of *Science and Health*, a one hundred-page long section titled “Fruitage” and consisting solely of testimonial letters reporting triumphs over all manner of disorders.

That the words, “By their fruits ye shall know them”

11. Henry James, Sr., “Spiritual Creation and the Necessary Implication of Nature in It,” in *Literary Remains*, p. 205.

12. James, Sr., “Spiritual Creation,” *Literary Remains*, p. 208.

13. Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: N.p., n.d.), p. 172.

14. James, Sr., “Spiritual Creation,” *Literary Remains*, p. 209.

15. James, Sr., “Spiritual Creation,” *Literary Remains*, p. 215.

16. Eddy, p. 475.

17. Eddy, p. 468.

18. Frederick Harold Young, *The Philosophy of Henry James, Sr.* (New York: Bookman, 1951), p. 65. None of this is to suggest that Henry James’s religious philosophy was in all respects compatible with Mrs. Eddy’s. Although many of their premises were evidently similar, their ideas developed thereafter in very different directions. For instance, Mrs. Eddy and James differed greatly on the role of evil. Mrs. Eddy rejected evil as unreal, as the lie of a deceived mortal consciousness. Henry James, Sr., accepted evil as evidence of God’s supreme love. For his part, William James took a third view. In the words of Ralph Barton Perry, William “was too sensitive to ignore evil, too moral to tolerate it, and too ardent to accept it as inevitable.” Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1996), p. 122.

19. The passage from James’s introduction reads: “The feeling of action, in short, makes us turn a deaf ear to the thought of being; and this deafness and insensibility may be said to form an integral part of what in popular phrase is known as ‘healthy-mindedness.’ Any absolute moralism must needs be such a healthy-minded pluralism.” *Literary Remains*, p. 117.

20. *Literary Remains*, p. 119.

adorned both James's introduction to *Literary Remains* and the coda to Mrs. Eddy's book begins to explain why James was so fascinated with Christian Science and mental healing methods in general. His interest ran so deep that he sought proof of their efficacy until the end of his life. James was deeply sensitive to the fact that he lived in a materialistic country during an intensely materialistic age. Most post-Civil War Americans had less interest than their parents in ethereal idealisms. They demanded results, pay-offs, or, to invoke a term James himself liked to use, cash value. James spoke to the sensibility of his time when, in the closing chapter of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, he quoted James H. Leuba for the proposition that "God is not known, he is not understood; he is used."²¹ James suspected that the future of religion depended on its relevance to concrete concerns; precisely what was it that God could do for the believer? He wrote to Thomas Davidson:

I confess I rather despair of any popular religion of a philosophic character; & I sometimes find myself wondering whether there can be any popular religion raised on the ruins of the old Christianity without the presence of that element which in the past has presided over the origin of all religions, namely a belief in new physical facts & possibilities. Abstract considerations about the soul & the reality of a moral order will not do in a year, what the glimpse into a world of new phenomenal possibilities enveloping those of the present life afforded by an extension of our insight into the order of nature, would do in an instant.²²

Although James thought it would be "strange" if a new era of faith were to be ushered in by movements akin to spiritualism, he admitted that he saw on the horizon "no other agency that can do the work."²³ James's problem was the theological problem of his age: how to keep religion vital and pertinent in the aftermath of Lyell and Darwin? Because of the recent revelations of science, religion was not salvageable, it seemed, on its own terms. James saw no future for religions that tried to sustain themselves solely on the grounds of dogma. It was noted earlier that James privately denounced Christian Science as logically absurd. Yet, in private, he at least tentatively extended this pronouncement to all faiths. In 1900, he wrote to Frances Morse, "all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories)."²⁴ Ironically, however, it was by an appeal to science itself that religion might be saved, if

only religious experience could be shown by scientific methods to produce socially valuable consequences.

James thought it insufficient that an idea might persuade or give comfort; it must also pay dividends. Religion, in particular, needed to be felt. It needed, if possible, to produce tangible, beneficial effects in the world of experience. In James's view, only the Christian Scientists and other mental healers offered a promise to satisfy this need. Whereas some of his contemporaries were coming to observe a deep division between science and religion, James saw a symbiosis between the two. Medicine needed the power of healthy-minded, religiously inspired thinking to produce its best results. Religion, for its part, needed the factual substantiation of scientific inquiry to withstand scrutiny in a scientific age. At the root of James's need to defend Christian Science and mind-cure, one finds not only the loyalty of a son to the idealism of a father, but also a desire to prevent science from driving spirituality toward the margins of popular culture. This loyalty and this desire were challenged when James wrote and spoke in opposition to the Medical Registration Bills of 1894 and 1898.

II. "I Must Urge My Point": Defending the Legitimacy of Mental Healing

In 1894 and in 1898, the Massachusetts legislature debated bills that, if passed, would have severely compromised the ability of faith healers to practice within the Commonwealth. On both occasions, James came to the defense of the mind-curers. Both times, the issue was the licensing of medical practitioners. In 1894, the state considered legislation that would have required all persons desiring to practice medicine in Massachusetts to acquire licenses by submitting to examinations "with reference to their knowledge and skill in medicine and surgery." Failure or refusal to submit to the licensing procedure would expose the practitioner to a fine, imprisonment, or both.²⁵ The 1898 bill provided that no one could practice medicine without first registering with a state agency, aptly named the Board of Registration in Medicine. The 1898 bill further provided that, after 1900, only graduates of reputable medical schools would be allowed to take the Board's examination.²⁶ Both bills had the sound support of the medical establishment; both encountered impassioned opposition from James.

On March 17, 1894, as the first Medical Registration Bill lay before the legislature, James wrote a lengthy letter to the Boston Evening Transcript, in which he

21. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in *Writings 1902-1910* (New York: Library of America, 1987), p. 453.

22. William James, "To Thomas Davidson," 30 March 1884, in *The Correspondence of William James*, ed. Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1997), V, p. 499. Cited hereinafter as *Correspondence*.

23. *Correspondence*, V, p. 499.

24. William James, "To Frances R. Morse," 13 April 1900, in *Letters*, II, p. 127. Emphasis added.

25. William James, "The Medical Registration Act," *Essays, Comments, and Reviews* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987), p. 145. Cited hereinafter as *ECR*.

26. James, "The Medical Registration Act," *ECR*, p. 567, n. 56.14.

announced that he had just signed a petition against the Bill. He offered three reasons for his opposition. James's first argument was that of a civil libertarian. Noting that it had long been a principle among Massachusetts citizens "to allow freedom of choice in personal matters," James denounced the paternalism of an act by which the state would presume to dictate the means by which the sick might try to become well. People were entitled to make their own decisions, reasonable or otherwise, and for the government to coerce the choice of one's therapist "would be a grotesque and puerile anomaly in a State where every man has from time immemorial been free to lose his health ... if he pleases, without the State interfering." If any personal right could be deemed truly sacred, "surely the right to treat one's body as one chooses may claim the title."²⁷

If James's first argument stressed an ideal of freedom, his second concerned a situation he saw as far from ideal. The unaided medical profession, James reminded his readers, could only begin to answer the needs of the people, and even that beginning was fumbling and error prone. The most desperate danger that confronted the patient was not presented by "a few mind-curers who may culpably ignore the body's obvious needs." The greatest peril derived from what James called "inadequacy of the regularly educated profession." It was not, he hastened to explain, that the doctors lacked industry, good will, or the best available training. Rather, "the task in its totality is ... beyond their powers.... What doctor doesn't have to shudder daily at the treatment he finds people undergoing at his 'educated colleague's' hands? What doctor's memory doesn't keep a dark storehouse of his own fatal or all but fatal ... mistakes?"²⁸ Given its own human fallibility, the medical profession was in no moral position to make outlaws of its faith-healing rivals. Moreover, James reminded his readers that the deadliest choices were often made by the patient himself, whose ignorant misapplications of medicines and therapies were potentially far more dangerous than the methods of mind-cure. To provide true safety to the public, the state would have to police every choice made by every individual on the subject of health. If the legislature was not prepared to make this ultimate encroachment on the patient's freedom, James argued, it should not undertake by half measures what it dared not do entirely. James concluded the second prong of his argument by ironically invoking the rhetoric of the free market:

The insecurity that this law would do away with, being an insignificant part of the general sum of insecurity, is not worth gaining at the price of interference with the spontaneous equilibrium of demand and supply in matters therapeutical.²⁹

²⁷ James, "The Medical Registration Act," *ECR*, p. 145.

²⁸ James, "The Medical Registration Act," *ECR*, p. 146.

James saved for last his most strenuously urged and most surprising argument: the practitioners of mind-cure, however strange their methods, possessed a unique body of knowledge and experience to share with the world. To criminalize their conduct would disserve the true interests of medicine by destroying a vital pathway toward understanding the relation between mind and body. In recent decades, James noted, science had discovered much about the nature and treatment of mental and nervous disorders; however, the medical advances had dealt almost exclusively with the symptoms of illness and had been effective only "over momentary states." Lasting results, James implied, were unlikely to be achieved by those who presumed to treat the mind by treating the body. Rather, James observed, "Of all the new agencies that our day has seen, there is but one that tends steadily to assume a more and more commanding importance, and that is the agency of the patient's mind itself."³⁰ It was in this realm that the Christian Scientists and mind-curers were acting radically and boldly. James could not, by any suspension of incredulity, accustom himself to the supposed logic of mind-cure, but it seemed undeniable that, when a Christian Scientist turned to God for help, something happened:

I assuredly hold no brief for these healers, and must confess that my intellect has been unable to assimilate their theories so far as I have heard them given. But their facts are patent and startling; and anything that interferes with the multiplication of such facts, and with our freest opportunity of observing them and studying them, will, I believe, be a public calamity.... [T]he chief task, perhaps of the science of human nature during the next generation is to be the clearer interpretation of all such phenomena as the mind-curers are producing in their crudity.³¹

In the 1894 session of the legislature, James's position prevailed, though not decisively. The Examination Bill was tabled, and the Commonwealth instead adopted a law that merely prohibited persons not qualified by state examination from claiming to be doctors.³² The issue of licensing did not go away, however. In 1898, the legislature again considered requiring religious and mental healers to pass examinations. Again James thrust himself into the controversy, this time stating his views in person before the Committee on Public Health. In his statement to the Committee, there was little that James had not already argued in 1894. This time, however, his

²⁹ James, "The Medical Registration Act," *ECR*, p. 147.

³⁰ James, "The Medical Registration Act," *ECR*, p. 147.

³¹ James, "The Medical Registration Act," *ECR*, p. 148.

³² James, "The Medical Registration Act," *ECR*, p. 149. This law had James's enthusiastic support.

tone was more caustic. Undeniably, he was still smarting from the numerous denunciations and ad hominem barbs that the medical profession had lately cast in his direction. James began by answering the charge that anyone who opposed the licensing bill “could do so only in the interests of ignorance and quackery.” James coolly responded by reciting his credentials, including his Harvard M.D., his membership in numerous medical societies, and his Harvard professorship. He added with ironical understatement, “The presumption is that I am also interested in Science.”³³ Had James considered the professional esteem that his position on the bill was costing him? Assuredly, he had, and his comments on this point revealed a previously unseen trace of the martyr. “I count some of the medical advocates of this proposed law among my dearest friends; and well do I know how I shall stand in their eyes hereafter, for standing to-day in my present position. But my duty is to the larger society, the Commonwealth. I cannot look on passively; I must urge my point.”³⁴

James’s remarks to the legislature are marked by his increased emphasis upon two points of his earlier argument and by one strategic retreat. His address laid particular stress both on the necessity of intellectual and devotional diversity and on the impotency of the legislature to regulate personal choices pertaining to sickness and health. If, said James, he were forced to choose one kind of healer to be singled out for continued legality, while all others were abolished, he would “unhesitatingly” opt to preserve the graduates of respected medical schools. However, no such choice was required, and the cost of choosing was unacceptably high. “Our State needs the assistance of every type of mind, academic and non-academic, of which she possesses specimens. There are none too many of them, for to no one of them can the whole of truth be revealed. Each is necessarily partly perceptive and partly blind. Even the very best type is partly blind. There are methods which it cannot bring itself to use.”³⁵ By presuming to shut out all other types of healing practice, the medical profession was not, as it claimed, striking an altruistic blow against ignorance and prejudice. Rather, it was merely seeking to privilege its own partialities above all others. Answering the doctors who charged the mind-curers with ignorance, James neatly turned the accusation back upon the accusers. How many recent Harvard Medical School graduates had ever actually tested a homeopathic remedy? Probably no more than a handful. How many of James’s own friends in the profession had bothered to investigate the alleged successes of Christian Science practitioner? He doubted there was even one. The battle over medical licensing, James contended, was not one of truth against

error, nor enlightenment versus ignorance, for truth and ignorance could be found in some degree on either side. Rather, the struggle was between two narrow-minded orthodoxies, each too immersed in its own experience and dogma to acknowledge the possible benefits of the other.

James also argued with redoubled vigor that the law was the wrong instrument with which to address the perceived problem. The law was either likely to be ignored, for “a people that loves quacks will have them, laws or no laws,” or, by sending the mind-curers to prison, the law would create a class of religious martyrs. In addition, it would “stamp out and arrest the acquisition of [a] large branch of medical experience.”³⁶ Moreover, it was absurd and overzealous to restrict the exercise of personal choice with the threat of prison: “Do you feel called on, do you dare, to thrust the coarse machinery of the law into these vital mysteries, into these personal relations of doctor and patient, into these infinitely subtle operations of Nature, and enact that a whole department of medical investigation ... must cease to be?”³⁷

As earlier noted, James’s argument in 1898 was in one respect less ambitious than it had been four years earlier. In 1894, James had called the facts of the mind-cure community “patent and startling,” and he had praised their “brilliant new results.” Now, however, he made no such claims. Indeed, the actual efficacy of mind-cure was now curiously beside the point. James urged the committee, “You are not to ask yourselves whether these mind-curers do really achieve the successes that are claimed. It is enough for you as legislators to ascertain that a large number of our citizens, persons as intelligent as yourself or I ... are convinced that they do achieve them, are persuaded that a valuable new department of medical experience is by them opening up.”³⁸ In Jamesian argument, perception had trumped reality, or, more accurately, perception had become reality. Not only was the health of the patient taken to be less important than the patient’s state of mind, but the patient’s best interests were assumed to be contingent upon the patient’s subjective convictions about the effectiveness of mind-cure therapy. James’s argument located the principal value of life, not in observable physical health, but in the subjective condition of the soul.

Ironies abounded in James’s defense of the mental healers. One of these was pointed out to him in diplomatic fashion by James Jackson Putnam, a noted neurologist and longtime friend who acted as James’s confidant during his 1898 campaign against the legislation. It was to Putnam that James complained on the eve of his address to the subcommittee:

If you think I enjoy that sort of thing you are mistaken. I

³³ William James, “Address on the Medical Registration Bill,” *ECR*, p. 56.

³⁴ James, “Address on the Medical Registration Bill,” *ECR*, p. 58.

³⁵ James, “Address on the Medical Registration Bill,” *ECR*, p. 60.

³⁶ James, “Address on the Medical Registration Bill,” *ECR*, p. 58.

³⁷ James, “Address on the Medical Registration Bill,” *ECR*, p. 59.

³⁸ James, “Address on the Medical Registration Bill,” *ECR*, p. 59.

never did anything that required as much moral effort in my life. My vocation is to treat of things in an all-around manner and not make ex-parte pleas to influence (or seek to) a particular jury. Aussi, why do the medical brethren force an unoffending citizen like me into such a position? Legislative license is sheer humbug — mere abstract thunder under which every ignorance and abuse can still go on. Why this mania for more laws? Why seek to stop the really extremely important experiences which these peculiar creatures are rolling up? Bah! I'm sick of the whole business, and I well know how all my colleagues at the Medical School, who go only by the label, will view me and my efforts. But if Zola and Col. Picquart can face the whole French army, can't I face their disapproval? — Much more easily than that of my own conscience!³⁹

Yet Putnam's support of James was far from unqualified. On the one hand, Putnam assured James that the "the best doctors" generally agreed that it was "a mistake to try to exact an examination of the mind healers and Christian Scientists." Nevertheless, Putnam, himself a practicing physician, could not look on the activities of the mind-curers with James's academic detachment. Whereas James might be right in principle, his stance might needlessly endanger lives. Putnam tactfully advised his friend, "I am afraid most of the doctors, even myself, do not have any great feeling or fondness for [the Christian Scientists], and we are more in the way of seeing the fanatical spirit in which they proceed and the harm that they sometimes do than you are."⁴⁰ The irony hinted at by Putnam was that James, who distrusted absolutism in almost every form and who insisted on judging ideas by their results, had fallen into a trap that seemed to run contrary to his principles. In his absolute defense of the right to seek medical treatment in whatever form one chose, James had failed to assess accurately the practical dangers of such dogmatic tolerance.

There was further irony in James's emphasis on the facts of Christian Science and mind-cure in his attempts to justify their continued existence. To James, whose emphasis on the cash value of ideas was omnipresent, it seemed clear that Christian Science should be evaluated according to the results it brought about in the observable world. James was later to write, "If theological ideas prove to have a value for concrete life, they will be true, for pragmatism, in the sense of being good for so much." He would further observe "that ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience."⁴¹ This, of course, was precisely what Christian Science seemed to do. It

appeared to use a religious belief, namely a sense of oneness with a benevolent and all-powerful Divine mind, in order to relieve illness and destroy sin. To observers like James, whose tough-minded empiricism pointed toward a view of truth as an instrumentality, the Christian Scientist must have appeared as the ultimate instrumentalist, using God not as a static, remote object of worship, but as a means of purifying consciousness and thus improving material life.

The contradiction at work in James's factually oriented defense of Christian Science was that the Christian Scientists ultimately did not care about physical facts at all; they viewed life in the material world as an illusion of the afflicted consciousness and denied the real existence of physicality altogether. Granted, Mrs. Eddy recognized the fundamental importance of observable, documented results in promoting her faith, and her desire to emphasize both the unreality of the physical world and the tangible benefits of Christian Science in that world whose reality she denied led her into irremediable contradictions. Mrs. Eddy's promotion of Christian Science made assiduous use of letters and narratives from followers testifying to their own experiences of the healing power of "scientific" prayer. Testimonials of this kind remain a focal point of Christian Science practice, forming the basis for midweek services. Thus James was partly correct when he wrote that Christian Science "is based and propagated largely on personal experience."⁴² However, all of the church's stress on personal experience was really an expediency to attract the interest of people who were accustomed to thinking in terms of physical reality. As a matter of religious doctrine, it made no sense to credit Christian Science with the healing of material bodies, because the religion held that no such body existed. Mrs. Eddy asserted, "According to Christian Science, the first idolatrous claim of sin is that matter exists." She further declared, "So-called material pains and material pleasures both are unreal, because impossible in Science." James had written to Davidson of his hopes that religion could find new vitality on the basis of "physical facts." In defending Christian Science, he allied himself with a philosophy that denied such facts with a passion.

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³⁹ William James, "To James J. Putnam," 2 March 1898, *Letters*, II, p. 66-67.

⁴⁰ James Jackson Putnam, "To William James," 9 March 1898, *Correspondence*, VIII, p. 351.

⁴¹ William James, *Pragmatism*, in *Writings 1902-1910* (New York: Library of America, 1987), pp. 518-19.

⁴² William James, "To James Rowland Angell," 4 October 1900, in *Selected Unpublished Correspondence, 1885-1910*, p. 236.

WJ, Camus and McDermott: Crisis and Context

By Michael W. Allen

There is good reason to think that an extended comparison of William James and Albert Camus would yield fruitful results. Foremost of these is that both thinkers insisted that philosophy extends broadly beyond analysis and intellection, and involves a whole conception of life. A related point is that their respective philosophies possess the capacity to supplement what one may find lacking in either thinker, when considered alone. Finally, a dialogue between James and Camus could form a basis for an eventual recasting of what is becoming an entrenched and in places bitter debate between proponents of classical American and continental thought, over the nature of instrumentalism. The flash point of this debate is the relationship between pragmatism and existentialism, using these terms generally. There is perhaps no better way to frame a comparison of James and Camus, than to utilize the thought of John J. McDermott.

Despite occasional movements toward dialogue, relations between pragmatism and existentialism have been hampered by at least two major obstacles. First, pragmatists, especially those who follow the philosophy of John Dewey, are wary that existentialism provides no basis for social problem solving. Sidney Hook, for example, claims that

The pragmatist answers that a genuine problem is always a specific difficulty of a concrete and/or theoretical nature in a finite context....The existentialist maintains that the world is absurd because he cannot find an answer to the so-called problem of the existence of the world. The pragmatist says it is absurd to say that the world is absurd. Only human beings can be absurd. The truly absurd thing about the existentialist is that he does not understand the necessity of being clear about the criterion of what constitutes a problem.¹

Second, existentialists worry that pragmatism, especially Dewey's philosophy, tends to be rationalistic, even technocratic. The latter concern is articulated by Peter Augustine Lawler, for example, who objects that "Dewey's Darwinian account of experience rejects radically the existentialist tendency to celebrate the irrational and to desubliminate the purely spontaneous, impulsive, and vital." The Deweyan ideal, in Lawler's view, is rather the "severe rational self-control of the scientist."² In this

1. Sidney Hook, "Pragmatism and Existentialism," *Antioch Review*, vol. 19, no. 2 (Summer, 1959), p. 160.

2. Peter Augustine Lawler, "Pragmatism, Existentialism, and the Crisis in American Political Thought," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 3 (September, 1980), p. 334.

vein, Elmer Duncan claims, "there is a sense in which Dewey did not believe in the existence of evil....the things that troubled Camus could hardly be termed social problems awaiting the successful application of the scientific method."³

Perhaps some common ground could be recovered by reconsidering the relationship between James and Camus. McDermott suggests that no final division exists between the two philosophies, although he recognizes that the influence of existentialism on his own work in American philosophy can be viewed as a source of tension. Adopting the voice of Camus, he warns:

Also, I am aware that this can be read as a telling departure from the radically empirical, pragmatic metaphysics of James and Dewey. Certainly it would appall those who hold to the conservative metaphysics of Peirce. And yes, it is Camus who is speaking here, the Camus who wants to know if he can live with what I know and with that alone and the Camus who tells us that for him suicide is the one truly serious philosophical problem.⁴

There are many issues here, but I wish to focus briefly upon one: How could a dialogue be initiated between the philosophies of James and Camus with respect to the issue of social relations? McDermott is again a thoughtful guide in this matter. One reason is that his interpretation of James is heavily influenced by Camus, especially James's famous crisis of 1870. The latter found himself confronted by a universe that, to apply McDermott's concept of ontological disconnectedness, "does not work," one where repeated attempts to solve the pseudo-problem of freedom versus determinism only plunged James deeper into paralyzing despair. What is significant about James's diary account of the event, for McDermott, is that

for perhaps the first time in his life, he avoids what had been for him a derivative and escapist solution. The direction he takes can be seen as an attempt to confront the actualities of his situation, and despite all of its uncertainty, to proceed from that point. Like Albert Camus of *The Rebel*, James does not resolve his fundamental problem, but he no longer allows it to crush future options.⁵

What James discovers is that a Camusian middle position

3. Elmer Duncan, "Existentialism, Pragmatism and Atheism: Rejoinder to Winetroun and Fisher," *Journal of Thought*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1981), p. 9. See also Elmer Duncan, "American Pragmatism and French Existentialism: Some Comparisons and Contrasts," *Journal of Thought*, vol. 14, no. 1 (January, 1979), pp. 22-28.

4. John J. McDermott, "Ill-At-Ease: The Natural Travail of Ontological Disconnectedness," *The Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, vol. 67, no. 6 (June, 1994), p. 11.

5. John J. McDermott, ed., *The Writings of William James* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1977), p. xxviii.

exists between the attitudes of nihilism and certainty. Like Camus, he learns that “Being deprived of hope is not despairing,” to borrow a phrase from *The Myth of Sisyphus*.⁶ But the two attitudes are too often conflated. Nevertheless, the difference is as distinct as are the philosophies of Camus and, for example, the early Sartre. In adopting Camus for his interpretation of James, McDermott steers the latter clear of Sartre’s philosophy, the brand of existentialism he seems to have in mind when he warns against the “temptation to see... [James’s] crisis of 1870 as an existentialist type of experience, primarily characterized by alienation.”⁷ Although Camus is typically called an “existentialist,” it is worth noting that he renounced the term, and thereby disassociated himself as strongly from Sartre as did Heidegger, saying of the former, “Sartre is an existentialist, and the only book of ideas I have published, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, was directed against the so-called existentialist philosophers.”⁸ The middle position shared by James and Camus, the one between ultimate hope and despair, orients their philosophies away from alienation and emphasizes sustenance through intercourse with nature and other human beings.

The rejection of alienation at the root of their philosophies serves as a basis for further comparison of James and Camus. The marked difference between the common beginning point of their thought and that of Sartre, is illustrated by Camus’s critique of Sartre’s novel, *Nausea*: “The realization that life is absurd cannot be an end, but only the beginning. This is a truth nearly all great minds have taken as their starting point. It is not this discovery that is interesting, but the consequences and rules for action that can be drawn from it.”⁹ The term “alienation” does not capture every facet of Sartre’s early philosophy, which is obviously very rich and complex. But the term “bad faith” covers with one shroud both the undesirable relations that threaten to crush individual creativity, as well as those positive ones that promise novel relations within a wider context. Life is more often what happens *to* us, not on behalf of us. The recognition that genuine living begins in a kind of de-centering ambiguity, and is not stifled by it, is the origin of the famous text from James’s recovery in 1870, namely that “Life shall [be built in] doing and suffering and creating.”¹⁰

While different in important respects, I believe that the common emphasis in James and Camus upon a dynamic and yet intensely connected self justifies the claim that there is a strong social component to their respective philosophies. In this vein, to cite McDermott

once more, James’s notion of self is “functionally rather than ontologically derived,” and the latter “duplicates the position of existential thought, namely that the human self has no fixed place from which to proceed....It is precisely this lack of an inherited place that...makes James’s thought so relevant to contemporary social thought.”¹¹ Similarly, in interpreting the trajectory of his own work, Camus claims, “Compared to *The Stranger*, *The Plague* does, beyond any possible discussion, represent the transition from an attitude of solitary revolt to the recognition of a community whose struggles must be shared. If there is an evolution from *The Stranger* to *The Plague*, it is in the direction of solidarity and participation.”¹² Camus’s term for such a recognition is “mature rebellion”: “Therefore the individual is not, in himself alone, the embodiment of the values he wishes to defend. It needs all humanity, at least, to comprise them. When he rebels, a man identifies himself with other men and so surpasses himself, and from this point of view human solidarity is metaphysical.”¹³ One thinks here of James’s “The Moral Equivalent of War,” and his attempt to unify human beings in the face of a common struggle. This also brings us full circle, for a moment, and allows us to recall McDermott’s comparison of the text of James’s diary with *The Rebel*.

Let me begin to develop what I believe is a major difference between James and Camus in their respective notions of social relations, by giving a very brief sketch of James’s view. The trajectory of his thought is similar to that of Camus, in that James’s later work can be seen to move in the direction of a social, and not purely individualistic, expression of human relations. In contrast to the individualistic character of some early essays, such as “Great Men and Their Environment,” and “The Importance of Individuals,” the later James seeks to establish common ground on the basis of “How Two Minds Can Know One Thing.” I read the latter phrase as Jamesian shorthand for how social relations are established. The primary obstacle to such a view is the predominant one, that for James, as Max Otto puts it, “social institutions endangered the purity of individuality.”¹⁴ But one thinks of James’s discussion of the “social organism” in “The Will to Believe,” his claim in a footnote to “The Function of Cognition,” namely that “you and I seem knit into a continuous world, and not to form a pair of solipsisms,” and a host of other such suggestive texts.¹⁵ My view, to

6. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 91.

7. *Writings of William James*, p. xxx.

8. Albert Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Thody, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 345.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.

10. *Writings of William James*, p. 8.

11. John J. McDermott, *Streams of Experience: Reflections on the History and Philosophy of American Culture* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1987), p. 54.

12. *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, p. 339.

13. Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 17.

14. Max C. Otto, “On A Certain Blindness in William James,” *Ethics*, vol. 53, no. 1 (October 1942): 184-191; p. 189.

15. For discussion of the “social organism,” see *Writings of William James*, p. 731; for the text from “The Function of Cognition,” see *Writings of William James*, p. 150.

use Dewey's language from *The Public and Its Problems*, is that James's later work employs a functional "public/private," and not a static "individual/social," distinction. In this vein, Dewey claims that the mistake people make in interpreting James as a proponent of individualism is that they convert the "adjective 'individual'...into a noun....The result is that identification of human beings with something supposed to be completely isolated."¹⁶ In going on to elaborate what he finds to be James's "actual position," he claims that the "fundamental" categories of "and," "next," and so on that are so crucial to James's "philosophical pluralism," should "refute the idea that James stood for an atomic individualism in the sense in which physical science has now abandoned its old doctrine of complete isolation."¹⁷ It is significant that the relations he mentions are derived directly from James's doctrine of radical empiricism. Dewey adds that James's notion of these "intermediaries by which we are tied together" could mend the current "blanks and holes in human association" that make totalitarianism look appealing.¹⁸

But in contrast to Camus, to get to the larger point, James introduces a sophisticated notion of context in his account of human relations. Despite minor objections, the overall thrust of his view might well have satisfied Hook's desire that human difficulty be articulated in terms of well-stated problems, and approached through a logic of inquiry. After all, as James claims in "The Sentiment of Rationality," the mark of rationality is a kind of fluency and ease of transition, the same trait that he would make the pivotal point of the theory of social relations he espouses in his radical empiricism. His account of radical empiricism in "A World of Pure Experience," which of course cannot be given full attention here, has it that your "objects...coalesce with my objects..."¹⁹ This "coalescing" happens when "your mind and mine...terminate in the same percept...by inserting themselves into it..."²⁰ Similarly, the objects we share are "a piece of common property in which, through which, and over which they join."²¹ In fact, at times his radical empiricism verges toward something as sophisticated as Mead's conversation of gestures:

Your objects are over and over again the same as mine. If I ask you *where* some object of yours is, our old Memorial Hall, for example, you point to *my* Memorial Hall with *your* hand which *I* see. If you alter an object in your world, put out a candle, for example, when I am

present, *my* candle *ipso facto* goes out. It is only as altering my objects that I guess you to exist.²²

The question, therefore, is the following: Is there a sense in which James is unsuccessful in matching Camus's appreciation for the unifying aspect of crisis? Is it fair to say that James "fixes" social relations, for lack of a better phrase, on the basis of context and not crisis? By emphasizing such a question, I run the risk of perhaps drawing too rigid a division between the two, and moreover between James and Camus. But I wish to follow it out, in order to pose a final question at the end.

Camus's rejoinder to the foregoing sketch of radical empiricism and social relations, might be that the phenomenon of human solidarity does not depend upon an articulate theory of context. He might well have regarded such a notion as a piece with the puzzles and games that we play, instead of concerning ourselves with what is for him the one true philosophical question, namely whether or not life is worth living. It is directly from the issue of whether life is worth living that Camus derives his account of human solidarity. The case can be made, therefore, that Camus employs crisis, and not context, as the ground or origin of social relations. The words he uttered in 1945, when he was conceiving *The Plague*, suggest such a notion: "if there is one fact that these last five years have brought out, it is the extreme solidarity of men with one another."²³ In the latter text, solidarity seems driven directly by the momentous nature of the crisis at hand. To say that there is a kind of "fluency" between, or "coalescence" of, the acts of Dr. Rieux and his patients, one that perceives a common object, seems to lose something of the significance of the emergency. Dr. Rieux heals the "sick" at great risk to himself because he is prepared to ask Camus's question, namely, "To put it all in a nutshell...why this eagerness to live in limbs that are destined to rot?"²⁴

But does James ask himself this question? James does concern himself with the issue of suicide, and therefore directly with the issue of whether or not life is worth living. This would address Duncan's concern over Dewey and the problem of evil, except for the fact that James's tendency is to try to talk the suicide down. He says, "But can *we* find nothing richer or more positive... that in spite of adverse appearances even for him [the suicide] life is still worth living?"²⁵ Again, James sometimes expresses a cosmic optimism with respect to life, death, and dying, one that threatens to shift him out of the middle position with Camus: "If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by suc-

16. John Dewey, "William James and the World Today," in *The Later Works of John Dewey: 1925-1953, vol. 15: 1942-1948*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1991), p. 4.

17. Ibid, p. 5.

18. Ibid, p. 6.

19. *Writings of William James*, p. 210.

20. Ibid, pp. 210-211.

21. Ibid, p. 212.

22. Ibid, pp. 209-210.

23. *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, p. 346.

24. Ibid, p. 200.

25. William James, "Is Life Worth Living?" in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979), p. 39.

cess, it is no better than a game of private theatricals from which one may withdraw at will."²⁶ In this vein, one recalls James's remark that the more somber writings of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche "remind one...of the sick shriekings of two dying rats."²⁷ It is for this reason, perhaps, that when he considers the meaning of his life, McDermott tells us, he does not reach for James's "Is Life Worth Living?" but rather for Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*.²⁸

If there is a sense in which James never makes the Camusian connection between the existential risk of crisis and solidarity, there is also an important sense in which James's solution to his crisis in 1870 differs from that outlined in *The Rebel*. In closing, I will turn briefly to this issue exclusively. To phrase it differently, how crucial is it for a theory of social relations that one's philosophy inhabit such a middle position? Can a *social*, and not just a personal, life be "built" in "doing, suffering, and creating," if ultimate success is then filed in through the back door, and, furthermore, is it fair to characterize James's thought in terms of the latter statement? To use Camus's terms, James's philosophy is strong on the notion of not giving in to despair, but how firm is his commitment to giving up hope in the ultimate sense? This is of course not a new question of James, but what I am suggesting is that the issue poses significance with respect to his view of social relations. I am particularly interested in this question, because it shifts the emphasis from James's being an individualist, a charge that for me doesn't seem to quite fit. I am also interested, and this is by far a more important question, because I want to know what James would say about the two people, holding hands, who jumped from the first tower of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

There is evidence to suggest that James wishes to make the connection between crisis and community. Just prior to the text on the "social organism," in "The Will to Believe," for example, James seems to identify the formation of social relations with a form of risk or crisis:

Turn now from these wide questions of good to a certain class of questions of fact, questions concerning personal relations, states of mind between one man and another. *Do you like me or not?* for example. Whether you do or not depends, in countless instances, on whether I meet you half-way, am willing to assume that you must like me, and show you trust and expectation. The previous faith on my part in your liking s existence is in such

cases what makes your liking come. But if I stand aloof, and refuse to budge an inch until I have objective evidence...ten to one your liking never comes.²⁹

James was also attentive to the solidarity that he witnessed in the wake of the San Francisco quake of 1906, an assessment that would have been accurate of New York City in 2001, except in the latter case for the multitude of disastrous possibilities, for which there simply was and is no solution: "In point of fact, not only in the great city, but in the outlying towns, these natural order makers, whether amateurs or officials, came to the front immediately. There seemed to be no possibility which there was not some one there to think of, or which within twenty-four hours was not in some way provided for."³⁰ But when asked to join the American Philosophical Association in 1901, to give what I take to be an opposing example, James remarked, "I don't see much good from a Philosophical Society. Philosophical discussion proper only succeeds between intimates who have learned how to converse by months of weary trials and failure. The philosopher is a lone beast dwelling in his individual burrow."³¹ The luxury of having months to spend confronting the "weary" difficulties of upper-class conversation belies the greater crises of the American Civil War and the existence of slavery, for just two examples, that James does not discuss in his writings. From this perspective, Otto is on the mark when he claims of a book review, that it shows that James's "thinking was practically unaffected by the unjust functioning of institutionalized society and that it was not seriously disturbed by the disastrous impact of a niggardly environment upon the physical and moral energies of men and women."³² How are we to interpret James's grand statement, and how assess it for a theory of social relations: "It is a real adventure, with real danger, yet it may win through. It is a social scheme of co-operative work genuinely to be done. Will you join the procession? Will you trust yourself and trust the other agents enough to face the risk?"³³

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26. Ibid, p. 55.

27. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985), p. 39.

28. John J. McDermott, "Why Bother: Is Life Worth Living?," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 88, no. 11 (November 1991), pp. 677-683; 680. I attach significance to the fact that McDermott does not include "Great Men and Their Environment," "The Importance of Individuals," or "Is Life Worth Living?," in his *Writings of William James*.

29. *Writings of William James*, p. 730.

30. William James, "On Some Mental Effects of the Earthquake," in *Memories and Studies* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), p. 222.

31. In Gay Wilson Allen, *William James* (New York: Viking Press, 1967), p. 429.

32. "On a Certain Blindness in William James," p. 186.

33. *Writings of William James*, p. 468.

Varieties of Religious Experience (James)

by G. K. Chesterton

Whitehead's Reading of James and Its Context, Part One

by Michel Weber

When Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) visited Harvard in 1936, “there were two heroes in his lectures—Plato and James.”¹ Although this claim should be carefully examined in itself, the exact same could be said of his former mentor Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947). According to the author of *Process and Reality*, philosophical movements articulate themselves around two characters: the genius who inaugurates them, and the systematizer who gives form and expands the founding intuitions of the former.² Whitehead was too humble to consider himself as more than a systematizer of other’s intuitions; and the complete list of the thinkers he praises (in one way or another) would be quite long: the early Whitehead is particularly sensitive to the recent foundational developments in algebra and geometry (G. Peano, G. Cantor, G. Frege; H. Grassmann, W. Hamilton, G. Boole, G. Riemann; Leibniz’s and Russell’s shadows should not be forgotten); his middle period especially tackles electromagnetism, including the nascent quantum mechanics (M. Faraday, J. C. Maxwell, M. Planck) and Einstein’s relativities (including H. Minkowsky’s and H. Poincaré’s inflections); the late Whitehead also shows the influence of contemporary thinkers: S. Alexander, H. Bergson, F. H. Bradley, C. D. Broad, J. Dewey, L. J. Henderson, W. James, J. McTaggart, G. H. Mead, and G. Santayana. In the background, the systems of Aristotle, Descartes, Galileo, Hume, Kant, Leibniz, Locke, Newton, and Plato stand out as well.

This paper attempts to quote all the *explicit* occurrences of James in Whitehead’s corpus and to weave them into a synthetic argument. It argues from the texts themselves, factually putting into brackets previous inquiries dealing with Whitehead’s Jamesian legacy. For more details about the available secondary literature, see our “Further Readings” section at the end of the paper.

The argument is serialized in two parts of two sections each: “general background” and “stylistic similarities” are unfolded now; “specific impacts,” “panpsychism,” and a short “epilogue,” followed by the bibliography and suggestions for “further readings” will conclude the debate in a forthcoming issue of this newsletter.

General Background

The above list of thinkers is not exhaustive, and, according to the circumstances, Whitehead puts emphasis on one “supreme master of thought” (PR39) rather than another. There is, however, an obvious fourfold influence on his later speculations, as he himself testified:

In Western literature there are four great thinkers, whose services to civilized thought rest largely upon their achievements in philosophical assemblage; though each of them made important contributions to the structure of philosophic system. These men are Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, and William James. (MT2)

Plato is constantly acclaimed for his numerous flashes of insight *and* the openness with which he systematically expands them: “Plato moves about amid a fragmentary system like a man dazed by his own penetration” (AI147)—hence:

The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato. I do not mean the systematic scheme of thought which scholars have doubtfully extracted from his writings. I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through them. His personal endowments, his wide opportunities for experience at a great period of civilization, his inheritance of an intellectual tradition not yet stiffened by excessive systematization, have made his writing an inexhaustible mine of suggestion. (PR39)

Notice his derogatory assessment of the systematization of Plato (something German scholars have been prone to attempt, as he repeatedly remarked). Whitehead found the *Timaeus*, which he studied *very* carefully, definitively more inspiring than Newton’s *Scholium*: the former would have welcomed 20th science into its framework, the later could not.³ On the other hand, Aristotle receives both due acknowledgement for his decisive

¹ So has I. B. Cohen told H. Putnam: cf. Hilary Putnam, *Pragmatism: An Open Question*, Oxford/Cambridge, Blackwell, 1995, p. 6. With that regard, it is interesting to notice that in Russell’s 1950 essay “Eminent Men I have Known,” James is said to be “the most personally impressive” philosopher, and “this was in spite of a complete naturalness and absence of all apparent consciousness of being a great man” (Bertrand Russell, *Unpopular Essays*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1950; we quote the Routledge edition [London, 1995, pp. 181-187]). Russell is explicitly excluding philosophers still alive from this assessment: Whitehead, with many others, is not mentioned at all, either because the essay was written before 1949, or because Russell was not in the mood to mention his former colleague and friend (and although in various places he had insisted on the importance of Whitehead for the development of his own thought).

² PR57 and 73.

³ Cf. PR70-74. Luc Brisson and F. Walter Meyerstein could be said to have followed Whitehead with their book *Inventer l’univers* (Paris, Société d’Édition «Les Belles Lettres», 1991; Author’s English revised version: *Inventing the Universe. Plato’s Timaeus, The Big Bang, And the Problem of Scientific Knowledge*, State U of New York P, 1995).

impact on the framing of the scientific mind, and lament for the speculative cowardliness he showed in key matters. Yes, Aristotle settled scientific inquiries with his “masterly analysis of the notion of ‘generation’ [... and,] in his own person expressed a useful protest against the Platonic tendency to separate a static spiritual world from a fluent world of superficial experience.” (PR209) Yes, he was the last metaphysician to have approached God's concept dispassionately (SMW173). But if he “invented science”, he “destroyed philosophy” (D139). He was indeed “the apostle of “substance and attribute,” and of the classificatory logic which this notion suggests” (PR209). This is exactly where the shoe pinches:

If you conceive fundamental fact as a multiplicity of subjects qualified by predicates, you must fail to give a coherent account of experience. The disjunction of subjects is the presupposition from which you start, and you can only account for conjunctive relations by some fallacious sleight of hand, such as Leibniz's metaphor of his monads engaged in mirroring. The alternative philosophic position must commence with denouncing the whole idea of “subject qualified by predicate” as a trap set for philosophers by the syntax of language. (R13)

Moreover, from an historical perspective, he has had a dogmatic influence on Western thought as well as a deceitful one; his ignorance of mathematics did not serve him well;⁴ and his Logic was “a more superficial weapon” than philosophers deemed it (AI117). For his part, Leibniz is not much discussed in Whitehead's corpus, which basically means two things. On the one hand, his impact on the “philosophy of organism” is so deep that it completely fades in Whitehead's categorical landscape; on the other, Whitehead has obviously not much sympathy for the German mind. This is after all nothing but a very personal affair: one feels at unison with some authors, and totally foreign to others. But it is probably

4. “In a sense, Plato and Pythagoras stand nearer to modern physical science than does Aristotle. The two former were mathematicians, whereas Aristotle was the son of a doctor, though of course he was not ignorant of mathematics. The practical counsel to be derived from Pythagoras, is to measure, and thus to express quality in terms of numerically determined quantity. But the biological sciences, then and till our own time, have been overwhelmingly classificatory. Accordingly, Aristotle by his Logic throws the emphasis on classification. The popularity of Aristotelian Logic retarded the advance of physical science throughout the Middle Ages. [...] In the seventeenth century the influence of Aristotle was at its lowest, and mathematics recovered the importance of its earlier period.” (SMW28-29) “Aristotle was clearly not a professional mathematician, and he does not in his works show any acquaintance with the higher branches—he makes no allusion to conic sections, for example—but he was fond of mathematical illustrations, and he throws a flood of light on the first principles of mathematics as accepted in his time.” (Sir Thomas Little Heath, *A Manual of Greek Mathematics*, New York, Dover Publications, Inc., 1963, p. 184.)

as well part of the political tragedy of the late 19th and 20th centuries: there have been, alas, many conflicts involving German and British people—and Whitehead's youngest son Eric was killed in action in 1918.⁵

Out of these four philosopher-scientists, Plato and James receive special appraisal because of their intuitive capacities, or—to use the concept that has a medullar virtue in Whitehead's essays—because of their *creativity*. As we will see in a moment, their style is closer to Whitehead's than Aristotle's and Leibniz's. The two latter are actually known for their systematicity: both were aiming at a full understanding of all the details of the God/World business, and consequently rigidified their writings as much as they could. Non-contradiction was for them a major concern. Having said this, we are forced to notice that the partition Whitehead uses between “intuitive” and “systematic” thinkers does not really apply to himself. He obviously considers that he is simply improving the coherence of utterances of geniuses like Plato and James, something that puts him among the “systematizers” or the “coordinators” of past achievements; but, when all is said and done, he is, as his style demonstrates, *not* interested in sealing an ultimate system. “In its turn every philosophy will suffer a deposition.” (PR7). His efforts in “*imaginative generalization*” make his thought belong to both sides.

This double tension really requires more development, but our short pointillist note will be busy only with Whitehead's *explicit evocations* of James (1842–1910). In other words, the broader question that is the “underground” influence of James on Whitehead's speculations will not be treated here. Let us first pinpoint his personal appreciation of James with five major exemplifications.

Science and the Modern World speaks of an “adorable genius” who “possessed the clear, incisive genius which could state in a flash the exact point at issue” (SMW2 and 147).

In a truly crucial passage of *Process and Reality*, his magnum opus, he speaks of “the authority of William James” (PR68; cf. our commentary infra).

A 1936 paper claims that “William James and John Dewey will stand out as having infused philosophy with new life, and with a new relevance to the modern world.”⁶

We have quoted supra MT2's commendation of Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, and James; here is what is said

5. PNK's dedication runs as follows: “To Eric Alfred Whitehead, Royal Flying Corp, November 27, 1898 to March 13, 1918. Killed in action over the Forêt de Gobain giving himself that the city of his vision may not perish. The music of his life was without discord, perfect in his beauty.”

6. Alfred North Whitehead, “Remarks to the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, X, 1936, pp. 178-186. Reprinted in *The Philosophical Review*, XLVI, 1937, pp. 178-186, and in ESP (without the first paragraph, and under the title “Analysis of Meaning”), pp. 122-131, here p. 123.

of the latter:

Finally, there is William James, essentially a modern man. His mind was adequately based upon the learning of the past. But the essence of his greatness was his marvellous sensitivity to the ideas of the present. He knew the world in which he lived, by travel, by personal relations with its leading men, by the variety of his own studies. He systematized; but above all he assembled. His intellectual life was one protest against the dismissal of experience in the interest of system. He had discovered intuitively the great truth with which modern logic is now wrestling. (MT3)

Interestingly enough, Whitehead speaks of Thucydides and Gibbon in a similar fashion: all three displayed an extended practical experience allowing them to understand the deep significance of contemporary events (D121-122 and 225). The *radical* importance of direct, lived, immediately given experience is, for instance, at the root of his criticism of Hume: philosophy must build on life as it is lived, not be developed independently—and supplemented—by ad hoc hypotheses drawn from “habitual experience.”⁷

Later on, in the same book, he adds:

Harvard is justly proud of the great period of its philosophical department about thirty years ago. Josiah Royce, William James, Santayana, George Herbert Palmer, Münsterberg, constitute a group to be proud of. Among them Palmer's achievements centre chiefly in literature and in his brilliance as a lecturer. The group is a group of men individually great. But as a group they are greater still. It is a group of adventure, of speculation, of search for new ideas. To be a philosopher is to make some humble approach to the main characteristic of this group of men. (MT174)

7. “Hume can find only one standard of propriety, and that is, repetition. Repetition is capable of more or less: the more often impressions are repeated, the more proper it is that ideas should copy them. Fortunately, and without any reason so far as Hume can discover, complex impressions, often repeated, are also often copied by their corresponding complex ideas. Also the frequency of ideas following upon the frequency of their correlate impressions is also attended by an expectation of the repetition of the impression. Hume also believes, without any reason he can assign, that this expectation is pragmatically justified. It is this pragmatic justification, without metaphysical reason, which constitutes the propriety attaching to ‘repetition.’ This is the analysis of the course of thought involved in Hume's doctrine of the association of ideas in its relation to causation, and in Hume's final appeal to practice. It is a great mistake to attribute to Hume any disbelief in the importance of the notion of ‘cause and effect.’ Throughout the Treatise he steadily affirms its fundamental importance; and finally, when he cannot fit it into his metaphysics, he appeals beyond his metaphysics to an ultimate justification outside any rational systematization. This ultimate justification is ‘practice.’” (PR133)

Whitehead was exceptionally comfortable at Harvard. Although he remained a “British Victorian,” as he used to call himself with humor and modesty, most of his hopes for civilization relied upon the ideals and the dynamism of American society.⁸ (Dwelling within the elite of the “Ivy League,” it is nevertheless doubtful that he was aware at all of the *struggles* of the lower classes.)

The remaining of this paper intends to display all the major references Whitehead made to James and to sketch their relevance for process thought in general. Most of Whitehead's references to the life and work of William James belong to his third—“metaphysical”—epoch. In 1924, Whitehead, who was retiring from London's Imperial College of Science and Technology, had been invited to join Harvard's Department of Philosophy. Three sections tackle the question of the Jamesian legacy: the stylistic similarities between the two philosophers are first examined; the specific impact of James on Whitehead is then exemplified; the question of panpsychism will be eventually evoked in a second (forthcoming) part.

Stylistic Similarities

Whitehead and James have different philosophical temperaments and backgrounds—the former remained basically an introverted British Victorian whereas the later was through and through an extrovert cosmopolitan, but a similar worldview takes shape in their works. In a previous paper,⁹ we have seen that two main features characterize James's style: circumambulation and constructive discrimination. Uphill, we found his *radical empiricism*; and downhill, his *non dogmatism*. All four traits seem to have had an echo in the late Whitehead—either because of an “atemporal” congeniality, or because of a factual impact on his philosophical development.

Whitehead adopts a methodological radical empiricism and considers pluralism as a matter of fact:

Fragmentary individual experiences are all that we know [...] all speculation must start from these *dissecta membra* as its sole datum. It is not true that we are directly aware of a smooth running world, which in our speculations we are to conceive as given. In my view the creation of the world is the first unconscious act of spec-

8. “There is an ideal of human liberty, activity, and cooperation dimly adumbrated in the American Constitution. It has never been realized in its perfection; and by its lack of characterization of the variety of possibilities open for humanity, it is limited and imperfect. And yet, such as it is, the Constitution vaguely discloses the immanence in this epoch of that one energy of idealization, whereby bare process is transformed into glowing history.” (MT120)

9. Cf. “Polysemiality, Style, and Arationality,” *Streams of William James*, Volume 2, Issue 2, Summer 2000, pp. 1-4.

ulative thought; and the first task of a self-conscious philosophy is to explain how it has been done.

There are roughly two rival explanations. One is to assert the world as a postulate. The other way is to obtain it as a deduction, not a deduction through a chain of reasoning, but a deduction through a chain of definitions which, in fact, lifts thought on to a more abstract level in which the logical ideas are more complex, and their relations are more universal. (AE163-4)

His motto is as well "to forge every sentence in the teeth of irreducible and stubborn facts."¹⁰ "We find ourselves in a *buzzing* world, amid a democracy of fellow creatures,"¹¹ and philosophy has to do justice to phenomena as they are given: "you may polish up common-sense, you may contradict in detail, you may surprise it. But ultimately your whole task is to satisfy it."¹² Now what exactly is given is itself a matter of debate in philosophy. Significantly enough, rather than theorizing the question, Whitehead gives a Jamesian "extensive" definition:

In order to discover some of the major categories under which we can classify the infinitely various components of experience, we must appeal to evidence relating to every variety of occasion. Nothing can be omitted, experience drunk and experience sober, experience sleeping and experience waking, experience drowsy and experience wide-awake, experience self-conscious and experience self-forgetful, experience intellectual and experience physical, experience religious and experience sceptical, experience anxious and experience care-free, experience anticipatory and experience retrospective, experience happy and experience grieving, experience dominated by emotion and experience under self-restraint, experience in the light and experience in the dark, experience normal and experience abnormal. (AI 226)¹³

¹⁰ William James writing to Henry James, as quoted by SMW3.

¹¹ PR50 specifying, in a footnote, "this epithet is, of course, borrowed from William James."

¹² AE107.

¹³ An alternative formulation can be found in student's notes taken during Whitehead's classes: "You must survey all the sides of the universe, the variations in our value experience, we must look at all rare moments when we were near angels and near pigs, and the rare moments when our value notion is so indiscriminating that it is a mere throb of immediacy, a vague feeling as when we fall asleep." (Frederick Olson, Alfred North Whitehead Lecture. Student Notes 1936-1937, Unpublished, to consult at Harvard's Pusey: HUC 8923.368.3) The polar themes of clarity and vagueness are essential in Whitehead: cf. our quote of Russell's *Portraits from Memory*, p. 40 in the "Assassination of the Diadoches," *Streams of William James*, Volume 3, Issue 1, Spring 2001, pp. 13-18, fn. 17 ("You think the world is what it looks in fine weather at noon day; I think it is what it seems like in the early morning when one first wakes from deep sleep"—claimed Whitehead.)

Eventually, let us note that *pragmatic consequences* of concepts are quite often evoked in the corpus.¹⁴ There is however only one occurrence giving his definition of "pragmatism."

This doctrine places philosophy on a pragmatic basis. But the meaning of "pragmatism" must be given its widest extension. In much modern thought, it has been limited by arbitrary specialist assumptions. There should be no pragmatic exclusion of self-evidence by dogmatic denial. Pragmatism is simply an appeal to that self-evidence which sustains itself in civilized experience. Thus pragmatism ultimately appeals to the wide self-evidence of civilization, and to the self-evidence of what we mean by "civilization". (MT106)

AI43 remarks that "each mode of consideration is a sort of searchlight elucidating some of the facts, and retreating the remainder into an omitted background." It would be of course a topic of its own to precisely discriminate the variations of meaning of the concept in James's and Whitehead's respective minds.

To exemplify the circumambulative practice in a paragraph is difficult, because it is made of waves of arguments that are, by definition, spread over his entire corpus and do not even always use the same concepts. A rather straightforward example is nevertheless provided by FR's definitions of the "art of life" (cf. pp. 4, 8, 18, 22, 26). One finds as well in his *Aims of Education* an interesting argument for a renewed educational expertise essentially made of a more focused training in key disciplines: students should get acquainted with a few essential (and interconnected) mathematical tools by actually applying them to various concrete problems. By so doing, the mind grows in a way far and away better than with classical training. Mechanical learning of fragments of knowledge does not bring the *mastering* of knowledge. Of course, he is especially concerned with the mathematical curriculum, but his argument is intended to have a broader expressiveness. By the same token, Whitehead insists on the notion of *rhythm*:

In approaching every work of art we have to comport ourselves suitably in regard to two factors, scale and pace. It is not fair to the architect if you examine St. Peter's at Rome with a microscope, and the Odyssey becomes insipid if you read it at the rate of five lines a day. (AE70)

This notion could furthermore be used to rebuild his entire percolative ontology: "the creative process is rhythmic: it swings from the publicity of many things to the individual privacy; and it swings back from the pri-

¹⁴ Cf. the "pragmatic test" of SMW50, RM27, PR13, 181, 337; or the "pragmatic appeal to the future", "pragmatic appeal to consequences" and the like (passim).

vate individual to the publicity of the objectified individual" (PR151).

Constructive discrimination expresses a typical mode of understanding of the nature and function of language. When carving discriminalities, we have to keep in mind the full concreteness of experience. According to Whitehead,

Philosophers can never hope finally to formulate [...] metaphysical first principles. Weakness of insight and deficiencies of language stand in the way inexorably. Words and phrases must be stretched towards a generality foreign to their ordinary usage; and however such elements of language be stabilized as technicalities, they remain metaphors mutely appealing for an imaginative leap. (PR4)

With that regard, while discussing James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, he insisted that:

The difficulty of communication in words is but little realized. If I had to write something about your personality, of course I could—but how much would remain that couldn't be put into words. So, when the rare balance of knowledge and perception appears, as in William James—one who could communicate so much more than most—it is perhaps an advantage that his system of philosophy remained incomplete. To fill it out would necessarily have made it smaller. In Plato's *Dialogues* there is a richness of thought, suggestion, and implication which reaches far. Later, when we came to be more explicit concerning some of those implications, we have a shrinkage. (D271)

Plato, James, and metaphysical intuitions are again in the hot seat. The existence of some arational "remainder"¹⁵ is directly linked to the linguistic position just discussed. When Whitehead says:

I am also greatly indebted to Bergson, William James, and John Dewey. One of my preoccupations has been to rescue their type of thought from the charge of anti-intellectualism, which rightly or wrongly has been associated with it. (PRxii; cf. AI223)

he has obviously in mind a dialectic similar to the one we have named with the trinomial "rational/irrational/arational." The concept of "irrational" pictures the discrepancies of status of a given proposition treated in different thought systems; the concept of "arational" points at the

fact that, whatever our rational efforts are (whatever the thought system), the fully-fledged concreteness remains beyond it. Logic has been shaken by the existence of "formally undecidable propositions;" metaphysics has still to draw all the consequences from the ultimate *rational* opacity of the concrete. Anyway, from a broader perspective, one has to acknowledge that "irrationalism" per se is to claim that reason has no public weight—whereas the authors here mentioned are reluctant to confer that weight *only* in the private sphere. The public use of reason remains fully justified.

Hence the professed non dogmatism from which Whitehead never departed himself, even at the speculative height that is PR:

There remains the final reflection, how shallow, puny, and imperfect are efforts to sound the depths in the nature of things. In philosophical discussion, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly. (PRxiv)

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¹⁵Cf. "James' Contiguism of 'Pure Experience'," *Streams of William James*, Volume 1, Issue 3, Winter 1999, pp. 19-22. See, for instance, *The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature*. Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902, New York, Longman, Green, and Co., 1902, p. 456. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985, pp. 359-360)

The Varieties of Religious Experience at SOWJ

Student Essay Contests

1) The Centennial of

The Varieties of Religious Experience

In honor of the centennial of the publication of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, the William James Society is offering a \$100 prize and publication in *Streams of William James* for best student essay (4500 words, maximum) which considers this book. Although this contest is designed primarily for graduate students, we also encourage undergraduates and continuing education students. Essays that receive honorable mention will also be published in an issue of *Streams*.

2) What Makes A Life Significant?

The William James Society is offering a \$100 prize and publication in *Streams of William James* for an essay (3000 words, maximum) that considers James's "What Makes a Life Significant" essay from *Talks to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* in relation to your own lived experience. Please do not reference views of other commentators, even if you are familiar with them. We encourage students at all levels, including those in continuing education, to submit work. Essays that receive honorable mention will be published in an issue of *Streams*.

To submit an essay for consideration:

1) Compose an e-mail to Randall Albright. Explain for whom the essay was originally written, class level, and other pertinent information.

2) Attach an electronic copy of your article in Rich Text Format (RTF) or Microsoft Word format.

3) Use the CC option to send a copy back to yourself for inherent copyright protection and send to Randall Albright <albright@world.std.com>.

Deadline: April 15, 2002.

Special Issue of SOWJ

Streams of William James is devoting a special issue this Fall to *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of its publication. Paul Jerome Croce <pcroce@stetson.edu> and John Snarey <jsnarey@emory.edu> are the co-editors. Submissions are welcome; please e-mail a copy of your manuscript to both editors.

The Varieties of Religious Experience @ 100

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- Philosophy
- Other Characteristics
- Conclusions

Thoughts on Varieties... from WJ in letters



To Frances Rollins Morse

The problem I have set myself is a hard one: 1st to defend (against all the prejudices of my “class,”) “experience” against “philosophy” as being the real backbone of the world’s religious life—I mean prayer, guidance and all that sort of thing immediately and privately felt, as against high and noble general views of our destiny and the world’s meaning; and second, to make the hearer or reader believe what I myself invincibly do believe, that altho all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories) yet the life of it as a whole is mankind’s most important function. A task well nigh impossible, I fear, and in which I shall fail; but to attempt it is my religious act.

—from April 12, 1900 letter, William James, *The Correspondence of William James, Volume V*. Ed. Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2001), pp. 185-6.

To Edwin Starbuck

...it would never do to study the passion of love on examples of ordinary liking or friendly affection, or that of homicidal pugnacity on examples of our ordinary impatiences with our kind[.] So here it must be that the extreme examples let us more deeply into the secrets of the religious life, explain why the tamer ones value their religion so much, tame though it be, because it is so continuous with a so much acuter ideal....At present I can see but vaguely just what sort of outer relations our inner organism might respond to, which our feelings and intellect interpret by religious thought....I have frankly to confess that my “Varieties” carried “theory” as far as I could then carry it, and that I can carry it no farther today. I can’t see clearly over the edge. Yet I am sure that tracks have got to be made there—I think that the fixed point with me is the conviction that our “rational” consciousness touches but a portion of the real universe and that our life is fed by the “mystical” region as well. I have no mystical experience of my own, but just enough of the germ of mysticism in me to recognize the region from which their voice comes when I hear it.

—from August 12, 1904 letter, William James, *The Letters of William James*, ed. Henry James (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920), II, pp. 209-210.