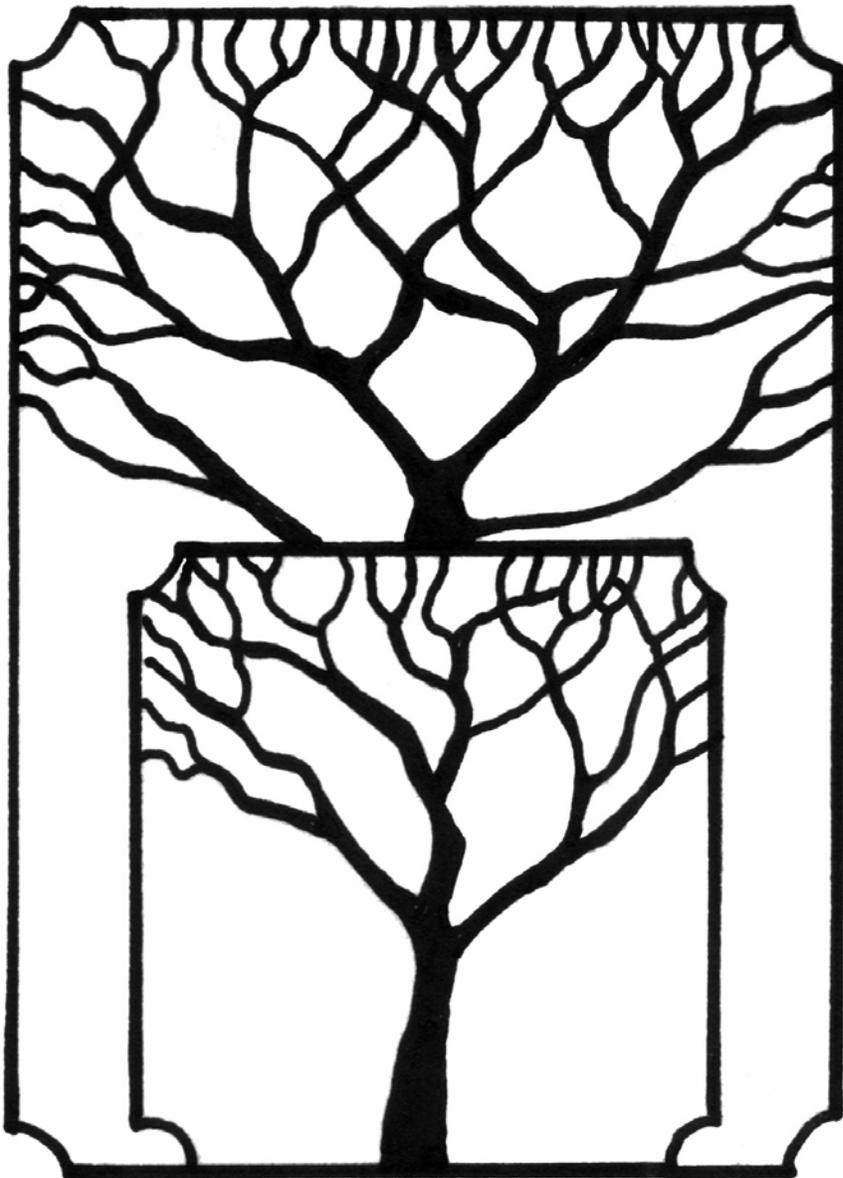


*Streams
of
William James*

*A Publication of the William James Society
Volume 5 • Issue 2 • Summer 2003*



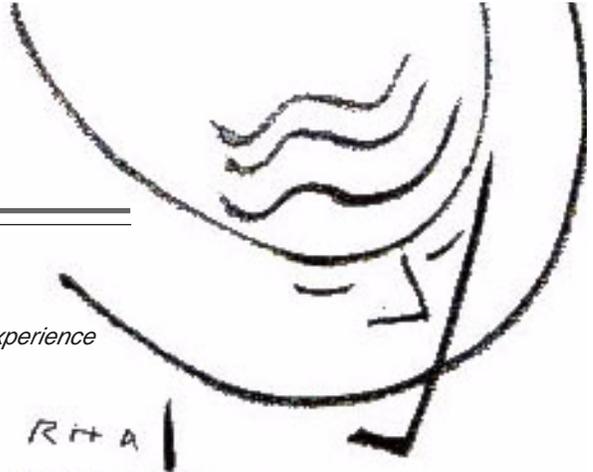
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*European Perspectives on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*
Felicitas Kraemer • Guest Editor*

Streams of William James

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Volume 5 • Issue 2 • Summer 2003

European Perspectives on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*
Felicitas Kraemer, *Guest Editor*
www.pragmatism.org/societies/william_james.htm



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—Article I,
William James Society Constitution

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Introduction to European Perspectives on The Varieties of Religious Experience

by Felicitas Kraemer

The essays in this issue of the *Streams of William James* are adaptations from the “William James and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: An International and Interdisciplinary Conference in Celebration of the 1901-1902 Gifford Lectures,” which took place at the University of Edinburgh, July 5-8, 2002.

The event was characterized by an amazing international and interdisciplinary pluralism. William James would have been delighted to meet scholars from all over the world, having backgrounds in philosophy, psychology, and psychical research, religious studies, and other disciplines, discussing his work from a variety of points of view. Many papers will be available in a book of *The Centenary Papers: William James and The Varieties of Religious Experience*, edited by Jeremy Carrette (Routledge, forthcoming).

The papers collected in this issue were originally presented in a session called “James’s Philosophy of Religion and the Responses to It,” which was chaired by Timothy L. S. Sprigge (Edinburgh) and Michel Weber (Louvain la Neuve). Our thanks go to them for their organizational efforts and their hospitality.

The essays are organized into two groups: those dealing with others’ historical opinions of James and those dealing with contemporary reactions to *Varieties*.

The first article in this issue deals with the intellectual friendship between the French philosopher Emile Boutroux and William James. Boutroux was one of the main supporters of James’s philosophy in France. Mathias Girel shows that Boutroux, in his reading of James, tries to “make a classic out of James,” putting him into line with a Kantian approach to experience.

Jaime Nubiola and Izaskun Martínez consider James’s reception in Spain over the years and the philosopher-poet Unamuno y Jugo’s reading of *Varieties*. It was mainly by Unamuno’s influence that James’s ideas became well known in the Hispanic world.

In the third article Sergio Franzese analyzes James’s criticism of Nietzsche’s view of the saint and of asceticism in *Varieties*. Whereas Nietzsche tends towards a monistic account of energy, Franzese shows how James tries to avoid this facile solution and therefore adopted a problematic perspective on the moral “value of saintliness.”

Ramón del Castillo begins the contemporary reactions to *Varieties* with an article that discusses American approaches to religious individualism. He considers how the public and the private aspects of religion are related

in terms of different phenomena and shows how James interprets American religiosity in a pragmatic way.

The last article examines the role of active and passive moments of religious experience, the latter exemplified by religious self-surrender. I discuss how James’s account of reality as the “full fact” developed in *Varieties* avoids the alternative between realism and idealism and corresponds with his definition of the Divine.

The contemporary papers are supplemented by visual art. “William James” by the German artist Gerhard Richter is part of his “48 Portraits” series, which was recently exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and in San Francisco; *Varieties* imagery is by Spanish artist Sylvia Gil; and a piece by German artist Roland Pippes closes the issue.

During the conference there was a meeting of *The European William James Project* (EWJP), including the election of European delegates. EWJP had been launched by Michel Weber in conjunction with Jaime Nubiola and Jack Barbalet in 2001 in order to offer a venue for Jamesian scholarship on the Continent. It is linked with the William James Society. The main goal of EWJP is to establish cross-disciplinary networking between European scholars involved in Jamesian studies from all the different areas of his work. Another format for our group will be the *European Studies in Process Thought* (ESPT) issue in Summer 2003.

EWJP offers a chance to bridge the traditional and the newly emerged gaps between the so-called “Old World” and “New World.” Such an effort would certainly have been welcomed by William James himself, who was a lifelong traveler between these worlds. In the course of the Edinburgh conference from which these articles came, William James’s European sources and receptions turned out to have enhanced a fruitful transatlantic exchange of ideas. Maybe this meets the expectation James had expressed in his Gifford Lectures: “I hope that our people may become in all these higher matters even as one people.”¹

On behalf of all the authors, I wish to thank those who have helped to organize the conference and who took part in the discussion. Last but not least, our cordial thanks go out to Randall Albright. Randall, with his never-ending editorial patience and mindful enthusiasm, has made this issue of the volume possible.

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1. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1985), p. 12 [New York: Penguin, 1982, p. 2].

Varieties of Experience in Boutroux & James

by Mathias Girel

Introduction

This is part of an exotic journey in the “Nineteen-Hundred Moment,”¹ the acquaintance of which is so often useful in order to delineate James’s originality. Brilliant stars, such as Bergson and Renouvier, have long eclipsed other minor lights such as Lalande, Fouillée, and Brochard. Emile Boutroux definitely belonged to this brand of philosophers, whose influence was prominent and pervasive, if more discrete. Describing pragmatism as a movement in 1910, James went as far as to write: “It is the real empiricism, the real evolutionism, the real pluralism; and Boutroux (after Renouvier) was its earliest, as he is now its latest, prophet.”²

In 1908 James told Flournoy that he had met a French philosopher he found very “simpatico,” and it happened to be the starting point of a friendship which was to last until James’s death in 1910.³ One of James’s very last letters was sent to Boutroux to thank him for a reproduction of Pascal’s death mask. The Jameses opened their doors to Boutroux when he came to Cambridge to deliver his *Hyde Lectures* in 1910, and they also spent some time together when the Jameses visited Paris the same year. James and Boutroux thus became acquainted very late in their life. It had been more than thirty years after the publication of Boutroux’s *Contingency of the Laws of Nature*, and it was only two years from James’s death. It was not only a social relationship, but one with institutional support. Boutroux had James elected as “Foreign Correspondent” at the Institut, and James wrote a deferential account of *Boutroux’s Lectures*. These two events marked a point in the history of ideas: the meeting between a certain kind of French philosophy and of America’s philosophy as represented by James. James described Boutroux as “a somewhat ascetic looking figure, with a very French and rather military physiognomy, but with the kindest of manners, a power of extraordinarily clear statement, and, above all, a great air of simplicity and sincerity while lecturing.”⁴ Boutroux also provided a famous description of

James’s office: “the ‘library’, which serves as Professor James’s place of work, contains not only a desk, table and books, but couches, window-seats, Morris-chairs, welcoming visitors at all hours of the day, so that it is in the midst of merry conversations, among ladies taking tea, that the profound philosopher meditates and writes.”⁵

As far as these philosophical insights are concerned, the James-Boutroux relationship is interesting for three sets of reasons:

1) Boutroux was one of the major introducers of James in France. His *William James* (1911) was a key element of James’s reception in France, and it was the first general account of James’s thought in French. As Horace Kallen remarked:

It was from France that William James first received his philosophic inspiration, from France that he received his earliest recognition and his greatest honor. It is, therefore, right and fitting that the first book written in memory of him should be from the hand of a Frenchman. The author, M. Boutroux, is a friend of long standing, Mr. James’s sponsor in the Institute. His book is a memorial of this fine friendship as well as an appreciation of genius.⁶

2) There is an obvious analogy between James’s tychism, the term he borrowed from Peirce, and Boutroux’s own philosophy of nature. Boutroux had published an epoch-making book on *The Contingency of the Laws of Nature* as early as 1874,⁷ where many elements of pragmatism were broached.

3) The third set of reasons concerns the philosophy of religion. Boutroux wrote an enthusiastic preface to the French translation of the *Varieties*, and James’s philosophy of religion is the subject matter of a whole chapter in Boutroux’s *Science et Religion* (1908),⁸ which proves that the preface was not a mere separate occasion. The topic also pervades the little book Boutroux devoted to James in 1911.⁹

The first set of reasons needs to be explored for its own sake in the larger context of French philosophy

1. I am borrowing this phrase from the French philosopher Frédéric Worms.

2. William James, “A French Philosopher at Harvard” (1910) in *Essays in Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1978), p. 166.

3. See Ralph Barton Perry’s narrative in *The Thought and Character of William James* (Boston: Little Brown, 1935), vol. 2, pp. 560-569.

4. James, “A French Philosopher at Harvard,” p. 167.

5. “Observations d’E. Boutroux sur son voyage en Amérique” in *Compte-rendu de l’Académie des Sciences morales et politiques* (Paris, 1910), p. 9.

6. H. M. Kallen, “Review of Boutroux’s *William James*” in *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, Volume 8, Issue 21 (Oct. 12, 1911), pp. 583-584.

7. Emile Boutroux, *La Contingence des lois de la nature* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1874).

8. Emile Boutroux, *Science et Religion* (Paris: Flammarion, 1908).

9. Emile Boutroux, *William James* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1911).

around 1900. The second set of reasons is an interesting feature that I shall develop on another occasion. I shall discuss the third set of reasons in the following sections.

Boutroux and James's 'Religious Experience'

Boutroux wrote a good deal on James after 1905, and a major part of these references were related to James's concept of "religious experience." It might even be argued that Renouvier, Bergson, and Boutroux played the following roles in the reception of James's works: while Renouvier provided in his *Critique Philosophique* a platform for most of the essays collected in the *Will to Believe*, Bergson had a notorious—if complex—relationship with James's pragmatism, and Boutroux did a similar job with *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (hereinafter cited as *Varieties*). Most of Boutroux's commentaries on James can be read as reflections upon the *Varieties*.

There are at least three important works by Boutroux to consider: (1) the preface to the translation of the *Varieties*, written in 1905;¹⁰ (2) the chapter on William James in *Science and Religion*, written in 1908; and (3) The section on the "Psychology of Religion" in his *William James* published in 1911. If we read these three texts in chronological order, we see Boutroux's interpretation growing in complexity. However, all of these occasions also point to a problem which Boutroux had concerning the very definition of *experience*.

The Preface to the Varieties

Late in 1905, Boutroux wrote the preface for the French edition of *Varieties*, Bergson having declined to do so because of his low opinion of the French translation. Boutroux held there that James's agenda was simply to "add" a religious experience to the psychological and physical experiences explored in *The Principles of Psychology*, in the same way as he himself had described in his *Contingency of the Laws of Nature* the sundry spheres of nature.

More importantly, Boutroux thought that a *critique*—in the Kantian sense—of religious experience was appropriate, and not a mere enumeration of subjective states. For him, there is thus a double problem about James's account of religious experience. First, from the standpoint of objectivity, is it an *experience* at all? Second, from the standpoint of religion, can this

kind of experience count as a *religious* experience? Boutroux asks :

What is, at the bottom of things, this special experience we call religious experience? Is it only a purely subjective state, or is it true communication with some being different or distinct from the conscious subject strictly speaking? Doesn't it seem that, in the same manner as Kant and Locke proceeded with a critique of sensory experience, it would be legitimate and necessary for a philosopher to proceed with a critique of religious experience?¹¹

To Boutroux's eyes, the answer is "yes," and it is exactly what he would develop, three years later, in the final chapter of his *Science and Religion*. He was writing not as a commentator but as another philosopher having distinct views on the subject. We can make this idea clearer by asking ourselves what exactly the alleged purpose of a "critique" is. A critique of pure reason, as Kant taught, would help us to delimitate what we can say about objects in general, and to tell how we are to establish this objectivity by a cautious analysis and critique of our powers. We can see why Boutroux's problem is a Kantian one. Boutroux thought that James had not instituted the very critique he was expecting. For Boutroux, the flaw in *Varieties* is to consider only the subjective side of this experience. James does not provide any *guarantee* that there is an objective side to it.

One may doubt this has something to do with James's project, and one must note that James's strategy is not to describe a transcendental *structure*, adapted to religious experience, but to explore experimentally its *varieties*, leaving aside the problem of the objective reality of this communication.

Since James's interest is not that of the conditions of possibility of religious experience in general, Boutroux does not do justice to this dimension of the *Varieties*. We find his criticisms to have a monist, rationalist, and finalist overtone, contrasting with the experimental method developed by James, as Perry rightly noticed. This first difference is supplemented by a disagreement about the individual or social nature of religious experience. Boutroux's guess is that religious experience is the index of an internal common life:

Is religion, above all, an individual phenomenon, or is it the echo in the individual soul, of an internal common life, of a certain nature that settles in a society of men? Is it not this participation to a larger and higher existence which transforms the individual, and produces in him this supernatural orientation?¹²

¹⁰ Emile Boutroux, *L'expérience religieuse*, translated by F. Abauzit (Paris: Alcan, 1906).

¹¹ Boutroux, Preface to *L'expérience religieuse*, p. XVIII.

Varieties of Experience in Boutroux & James by Mathias Girel

Boutroux's uneasiness in his reading of the *Varieties* can thus be summed up by asking two questions. Is it a *private experience*? Boutroux devotes more attention to the institutions, to the social embodiment of religion than William James, so much so that he would be in some way closer to the Henry James Sr. of *Society the Redeemed Form of Man*.¹³ Is it something like a *pure feeling*? If so, how would a feeling convey something about the religious nature of this experience. In Boutroux's, words, "Is pure feeling capable of predicates?"¹⁴ Boutroux thinks that in religious experience, we are faced with feeling infused with truth, that is to say an "intellectual feeling."¹⁵

Science and Religion

These two questions, enriched and developed, recur in *Science and Religion*. In that book, Boutroux dealt mainly with the alleged opposition between science and religion. After having dismissed the different kinds of speculative reconciliations between science and religion, he inquired whether there would be a *practical* solution to the problem in an enlarged concept of activity which provides the common ground for both the scientific and religious attitudes. Boutroux's analysis of James's theory consists mainly in two kinds of criticisms, from the standpoint of science and from the standpoint of religion.

(1) *Objections from the standpoint of scientists.* Boutroux holds that James's philosophy of religion is flawed because he wrongly equates "radical empiricism" and "universal subjectivism" as if any experience that is not a *scientific* experience could only be *subjective*.

James adopts the radical empiricist standpoint, and... in the objects outside of us, he can only see fictions of imagination and artificial constructions of the understanding.¹⁶

Boutroux's misunderstanding involves the term "experience." For James, pure experience is not an either/or case of subjective/objective. His pure experience exists prior to this distinction. The enemy in James is not the notion of an independent reality, but the idea that transcendent objects could serve as guarantees for perception, and could thus provide a back-

ground for all experience.¹⁷ Due to this misunderstanding, Boutroux thought that James faced the same difficulties as Maine de Biran:

Biran, however, was never able to prove his thesis; and one does not see how William James could prove that this proposition: "I feel God acting in me" is identical to this other proposition: "God is acting on me."¹⁸

This is the first of Boutroux's mistakes, and this point has been noted by James himself, in a letter of July 1906: "I am *not*, epistemologically, a subjectivist, in spite of what I call my radical empiricism"¹⁹.

(2) *Objections from the standpoint of religion.* Here, Boutroux's strategy is to claim that, if religion cannot be thought without involving beliefs, these beliefs cannot be grasped from a purely personal standpoint:

If feeling is the soul of religion, beliefs and institutions are its body; and there is life in this world only for souls united with bodies.²⁰

Beliefs take flesh in institutions, dogmas, practices.

One can wonder...if the very fact of religious experience would survive the disappearance of all the traditional, external, intellectual elements of religion.²¹

Religious Experience in Boutroux's William James

There are several flaws in Boutroux's little book, on William James. All have serious consequences on Boutroux's interpretation of the *Varieties*.

The first flaw occurs in the section devoted to *The Principles of Psychology*. If we keep in mind Eugene Taylor's remarks about the sundry poles of the *Principles*, involving a tension between psycho-physiology, abnormal psychology, and psychical research,²² Boutroux just deals with the parts where James undertakes a naturalization of the notions of moral philosophy without taking into account the dissociations of personality and the topic of psychical research. As a

¹⁷ See William James, *The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1975), p. 45.

¹⁸ *Science et Religion*, p. 335.

¹⁹ As quoted by Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. 2, p. 563.

²⁰ Boutroux, *Science et Religion*, p. 339.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Eugene Taylor, *William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U P), 1996, p. 57.

¹² Boutroux, Preface to *L'expérience religieuse*, p. XIX.

¹³ I am not claiming that Boutroux had read Henry James, Sr.

¹⁴ Boutroux, Preface to *L'expérience religieuse*, p. XIX.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Boutroux, *Science et Religion*, p. 331-332.

result, he deemed that the main problem in the *Principles* was only that of psycho-physical parallelism and the juxtaposition of experimentalism and introspection.²³ Accordingly, Boutroux thought that James was arguing in the *Varieties* for the reality of another kind of experience than that of the physical sciences,²⁴ and does not see that the whole problem of these experiences has to be formulated in a different manner.

In Chapter II, "Psychology of Religion," Boutroux reads the *Varieties* as the revelation that there is a third kind of experience, "religious experience" properly called. "Experience" becomes primarily "to experience," a term Boutroux uses as something like the German *Erlebnis*.²⁵ For this reason, religious experience is thus first understood through individual *varieties*.

Psychological experience has a perceptive field far more extended than that of physical experience. But religious experience, in turn, overwhelms psychological experience. The latter only involved the global content of a finite self, of a personality turned in on itself. Religious experience brings this personality to grow and enrich itself ad infinitum, because of its penetration by and communion with superior personalities.²⁶

We can see that Boutroux's concern, again in 1911, is the "Kantian" problem of the *delimitation* of the different kinds of experiences. Religious experience is located within the psychological experience and reveals its openness to other minds and other influences.

According to this doctrine, there is, furthermore, a continuous transition from psychological experience strictly speaking to religious experience, and likewise, from physical to psychological experience. Psychological experience integrates into religious experience, as physical experience does into psychological experience.²⁷

For Boutroux, these experiences are like different circles, interpenetrating each other.

Under the surface of fixed laws and the rigid determination of matter, there is the flow of consciousness: below the consciousness of every individual, separated from one another, there is mutual interpenetra-

tion of every individual's consciousness with the others', coexisting with their individuality in the sphere of the spiritual and divine world.

One would look in vain for a clear discussion of James's radical empiricism. Boutroux was aware of James's critique of atomism and of intellectualism, as we learn from the correspondence, but the chapter of his *William James* devoted to James's "Metaphysical Views" deals only with the Ingersoll lectures on immortality, with the *Varieties* again, and with James's remarks on Fechner in *A Pluralistic Universe*. Surprisingly enough, he held that the last word of James's philosophy was not to be found in the doctrine of external relations, but in the *internal relations* developing between consciousnesses:

There are...relations other than the external and mechanical relations of impenetrable atoms. There are real internal relations. Religious experience grasps this deep community.²⁸

This is certainly where the two men differ. Boutroux, assuming maybe that it would prevent some criticisms, proceeds to make a "classic" out of James. He wants to find a higher kind of order between consciousnesses, and thinks that, far from confining reason to a pure static understanding,

[i]t would not be contrary to the deeper tendencies [of James's thought] to recognize, behind the statical reason of the logicians, with their immutable categories, a living reason, dealing not with concepts but with being themselves, and envious not only of unity, immutability and necessity, but also, above all, of free harmony and internal community.²⁹

Boutroux tried to read James as a monist, as if James needed a living and concrete reason to support relations. In a few lines, Boutroux turns James upside down.

This interpretation... would bring James's philosophy in line with the classic tradition... For the *nous* in Plato and Aristotle belongs to a kind of reason superior to sheer logical reason—the *dianoia*—alongside with intelligibility, intelligence, causality and life.³⁰

One can be surprised that such a reading did not raise more critical reactions. Ralph Barton Perry remarked: "all of [these details] betrayed in Boutroux

23. Boutroux, *William James*, p. 36.

24. Boutroux, *William James*, p. 48.

25. Boutroux, *William James*, p. 55.

26. Boutroux, *William James*, p. 59.

27. Boutroux, *William James*, p. 63.

28. Boutroux, *William James*, p. 136.

29. Boutroux, *William James*, pp. 139-140.

30. *Ibid.*

a philosophical inheritance quite foreign to that of James; so that the more he honored James by assigning him to the company of the elect, the less was it James that he honored.”³¹ Perry echoed Kallen’s earlier lucid assessment of Boutroux’s *William James*:

I can not agree that the essential idea of his metaphysics was “the identification of reality with largest, completest, profoundest, and directest experience,” or that he ever would accept the existence, “behind the static *reason* of dialectic with its immutable categories, of a reason living and concrete, whose business is not with empty concepts, but with realities themselves, and envious, not only of unity, immutability, and necessity, but also, and above all, of free harmony and internal communion.”

This would indeed bring Mr. James, as M. Boutroux suggests, in line with the classic tradition, but no philosopher of this latter day... is so untraditional as William James. His note is truly a different note and a new note, far more so than even Bergson’s, and it is significant of changes by the rest of the intellectual world still unfelt.³²

Boutroux was therefore one of the key introducers of James in France, but this introduction ironically made James unapproachable. Although his book on James has been, with Bergson’s foreword to the *Pragmatism*, the lens through which many in the French-speaking world have received pragmatism and the *Varieties*, Boutroux merely provided a subjectivist and spiritualist vision of James, paving the way for many undue objections.

Conclusion

One must be cautious when comparing James’s and Boutroux’s philosophies. When we look at the overall pattern, there are biographical as well as thematic similarities. The two men stand as champions of freedom against the abstractions of science, and in their works they developed the idea that one cannot separate the domain of truth from some other deep concerns and interests.

However, this conjunction is by no means a convergence. Boutroux starts from a reflection on the sundry orders of reality to refine again and again his approach to reason and spirit, while James, starting from the ethical stance in the 1870s, ends by formulating his own concept of experience. As one of

Boutroux’s best commentators, Lionel Dauriac, puts it: I have said that [Boutroux’s] book read like a travel to Hume’s country. Though, it is not really one, if we see that this travel is made backwards, the eyes of the traveler being focused on the country he’s leaving. The author has sojourned in Kant, above all in the *Critique of Pure Practical Reason*, the essentials of which, the moral Law and the postulates, he wants to retain.³³

Although James and Boutroux met, they were in fact travelling in opposite directions. First, there is in James a naturalist and evolutionist strand which departs from Boutroux. Second, James was not part of the same “travel” Boutroux undertook. The early James meditates on “The Dilemma of Determinism,” but the mature James looks closer at the texture of experience to see that all the terms of the problem have to be reformed. There are definitely more varieties of “experience” in James than in Boutroux.

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³¹ Ralph Barton Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. 2, p. 569.

³² H. M. Kallen, “Review of Boutroux’s *William James*” in *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, Volume 8, Issue 21 (Oct. 12, 1911), pp. 583-584.

³³ Lionel Dauriac, *Contingence et Rationalité* (Paris: Vrin, 1924), p. 18.

The Reception of WJ in Spain and Unamuno's Reading of Varieties by Jaime Nubiola and Izaskun Martínez

"I am inflamed at the idea of seeing & knowing Spain."
—Henry to William James, 10 July 1877

William James sailed on the steamer *Spain* from New York to Europe on 10 October 1873, but he did not visit Spain or spend time in any other Spanish-speaking country in his life. James had particularly close ties to the philosophical communities in England, Italy, France, and Germany, but his personal links with Spain were much weaker. In those times Spain was not only an isolated and declining country. There was also a war between Spain and the United States in 1898 about Spanish dominance in Cuba and the Philippines. Despite the strong sociological and cultural contrast between the two countries, James's thought and books were soon received in Spain by prominent scholars such as Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), and Eugenio d'Ors (1881-1954). In fact, it is possible to assert that, contrary to the superficial impression, there is a deep affinity between the central questions of American pragmatism and the topics and problems addressed by the most relevant Hispanic thinkers of the twentieth century. Amongst them, probably the best and the earliest Spanish reader of James was Miguel de Unamuno, a leading intellectual in the Hispanic cultural world of the past century. Unamuno is most well known for his *Life of Don Quixote and Sancho*.

Our aim in this article, after providing the general framework of the reception of William James in Spain, is to trace the reception of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* through Unamuno's reading of this book.

1. The Reception of William James in Spain

Without any doubt, a sign of the warm reception of William James in Spain is the early translation of a fair number of his books. The first translation of James into Spanish appeared as early as 1900. It was a two-volume translation of *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) by Domingo Barnés (1870-1943), published by the Editorial Jorro of Madrid. A second edition appeared in 1909. Barnés was a well known Spanish educator of his time, member of the famous *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, and expert in psychology and sociology. Besides the *Principles*, Barnés translated a dozen books by contemporary authors such as John Dewey, Henri Bergson, and others.

The second James translation into Spanish was the work *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (1899), which appeared in 1904. The translator was Carlos M. Soldevila. Three years later, the first translation of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* into Spanish was done by Miguel Domenge Mir. It was published in three volumes under the title *Fases del sentimiento religioso. Estudio sobre la naturaleza humana* (Barcelona:

Carbonell y Esteva, 1907-08). This probably had a very small print run, because very few copies remain in Spanish libraries today. Roughly eighty years later, a new translation circulated widely, translated by José Francisco Yvars in 1986, which has been reprinted five times. This edition includes a foreword by the well known Spanish philosopher José Luis L. Aranguren, in which he writes that the year 1901-02 of William James's Gifford Lectures, "was a milestone in the history of psychology, and, therefore, in the history of religious psychology and in the consideration of religion by learned people."¹

The fourth translation of James into Spanish was *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* in 1909, under the title of *La vida eterna y la fe*, reprinted in 1922 as *La voluntad de creer y otros ensayos de filosofía popular*. The translator was Santos Rubiano (1871-1930), an army doctor who was a pioneer in the application of the methods and concepts of modern psychology in the Spanish army. A veteran of the Philippines and North African wars, he was trained as a psychologist at Cornell University in the United States in 1916, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Public Education. In that year Rubiano translated *Psychology: The Briefer Course*, which had a second edition in 1930. After the opening page there is a photographic reproduction of a hand-written text from William James dated 22 March 1908. The text is the following:

22.III. 08

...and am very glad to authorize you as my official translator. Believe me, dear Doctor, with sincere and grateful regards, yours very truly. Wm James²

Rubiano includes a lively "biographical-critical foreword" in his translation of *The Briefer Course*. He writes that this book "does not speak the professor alone, but the genius and the believer," and that James "was able to make from his own personality his own method of teaching, and [that] in his personality it was possible to find not only the philosopher but the good man."³ Besides these two works, Rubiano translated *Pragmatism* into Spanish in 1923, and in 1924 *The Meaning of Truth* as well as a new translation of *Talks to Teachers*.

In the 1930s the interest in James seems to have faded in the Hispanic world. Nevertheless, publishers in Argentina and Mexico in the following two decades produced reprints of old translations as well as some new translations. Among them are the translation of *Some Problems of Philosophy* by Juan Adolfo Vázquez in Tucumán, Argentina, in 1944, and a new translation of *Pragmatism* by Vicente P. Quintero in 1945, which includes a preliminary note by Jorge Luis Borges. In that text Borges described James as an "admirable writer" to the point that he was able to make attractive

1. J. L. L. Aranguren, "Prólogo" in W. James, *Las variedades de la experiencia religiosa* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 1986), p. 5.

2. W. James, *Compendio de psicología*. Translation by Santos Rubiano (Madrid: Editorial Daniel Jorro, 1916. 2nd edition, 1930).

3. S. Rubiano, "William James. Bosquejo biográfico. Nota crítica sobre su ideario psicológico," p. xiii in *Compendio de psicología*.

such a reasonable way of thinking as the pragmatism of the first two decades of our century, with “halfway solutions” and “quiet hypotheses.”⁴ Years later, for unknown reasons, Borges refused to include that foreword in his compilation of prefaces. In this same period in Spain, Luis Rodríguez Aranda translated *Pragmatism* in 1954 and *The Meaning of Truth* in 1957.

With the revival of pragmatism in the last decade there has been a new impulse to translate James into Spanish. In 1992 two manuscripts by James on substance and phenomenon that appeared originally in Ralph Barton Perry's *The Thought and Character of William James* were translated,⁵ and in 1998, on the occasion of the centennial of *Human Immortality*, a translation of this work by Angel Cagigas was published (Jaén, Editorial del Lunar). The most recent James publication in Spain has been a new translation of *Pragmatism* by Ramón del Castillo in the year 2000, including a foreword and editorial notes.⁶ As a summary of this enumeration we can say that over this century most of William James's books have been translated into Spanish. Only *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909) and *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912) are still awaiting a Spanish translator.

Turning now to the secondary bibliography on William James available in Spanish, we may arrange it in two groups. First are the books and papers in Spanish written by Hispanic authors. Second are the translation into Spanish of books and papers from foreign authors. A thorough study is still required, but we can say in advance that probably the second group is bigger than the first. This fact may be interpreted as a sign of the relatively low interest in James in the Spanish speaking countries and at the same time as a sign of the lack of real scholarship and of original production on American pragmatism.

Among the early translations of secondary bibliography, we mention Emile Boutroux's *William James* (A. Colin, Paris, 1911), which was reviewed by Eugenio d'Ors in the journal *Arxius de l'Institut de Ciències* (I/1, 1911, pp. 150-153); this was translated in 1921 into Spanish in Montevideo and published with a foreword by d'Ors (Editorial Claudio García, 1921). A paper by Emile Boutroux on William James's pedagogical ideas was published in the *Boletín de la Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (n. 617, 1911, pp. 222-231). Other later relevant translations are Ralph Barton Perry's *The Thought and Character of William James* (briefer version) by Eduardo Prieto in 1973⁷ and Jacques Barzun's *A Stroll with William James* in 1986, in which the affinity

between William James and the Spanish thinkers Unamuno and Ortega, “both fighting positivism,” are mentioned.⁸

Coming now to the original production on James in Spanish speaking countries, in 1961 Pelayo H. Fernández studied in detail how Miguel de Unamuno read William James, his frequent quotations of James, and his marginal notes in the works by James in his library. Fernández's conclusion was that Unamuno's pragmatism was “original with respect to that of the American, from whom he absorbed only complementary features.” However, in our opinion, the abundance of facts that Pelayo Fernández lists bears witness to a great influence and a great similarity between the two thinkers on many issues and problems. In any case, Fernández's doctoral dissertation and the subsequent monograph is the starting point—and it has been for us—for everybody interested in the reception of James in Spain, especially through Unamuno.⁹

In the case of José Ortega y Gasset, John Graham published a careful study in which, after noting Ortega's hostility to American pragmatism, he reveals “many basic connections, similarities and points of identity, so that concrete influence and dependence seem more plausible than ‘coincidence’ between Ortega and James.”¹⁰ Graham gives evidence that Ortega read James early in his career, and that Ortega was aware of James's radical empiricism as having anticipated the central notion in his own “ratio-vitalism.” His evidence for James's influences on Ortega through German sources themselves influenced by James is especially convincing.¹¹

In contrast to Ortega, Eugenio d'Ors, whom we mention above, is perhaps the Hispanic philosopher most conscious of his personal connection with American pragmatism. By 1907 he had defined himself as a pragmatist, driven by the same desires as moved his American counterparts, whom he hoped to outstrip by recognizing an aesthetic dimension of human action that could not be reduced to the merely utilitarian.¹² Forty years later, in 1947, in his *El secreto de la filosofía*, which crowned his philosophical career, he generously acknowledged what he owed to the American tradition.

In Latin America the connection with American pragmatism can be traced back to the hostile reactions of the philosophers Coriolano Alberini (1886-1960) from Argentina and Carlos Vaz Ferreira (1871-1958) from Uruguay against the pragmatism of William James and F. C. S. Schiller. The latter disagreed because of the spiritualism of these pragmatists, the former on the grounds of pragmatism being a threat to the traditional Catholic religious background. The

4. J. L. Borges, “Nota preliminar” in W. James, *Pragmatismo. Un nombre nuevo para algunos viejos modos de pensar* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1945), p. 10.

5. R. B. Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James* (Boston: Little Brown, 1935), vol. I, pp. 525-528 and pp. 578-580. Translation by Sebastián M. Pascual Sastre in “Manuscritos sobre la sustancia y el fenómeno,” *Taula*, 17-18 (1992), pp. 101-109.

6. W. James, *Pragmatismo. Un nuevo nombre para viejas formas de pensar*. Translation by Ramón del Castillo (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2000).

7. R. B. Perry, *El pensamiento y la personalidad de William James*. Translation by Eduardo J. Prieto (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 1973).

8. J. Barzun, *Un paseo con William James*. Translation by Juan José Utrilla (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986), p. 228.

9. P. H. Fernández, *Miguel de Unamuno y William James. Un paralelo pragmático* (Salamanca: CIADA, 1961).

10. J. T. Graham, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Life in Ortega y Gasset* (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1994), p. 145.

11. A. Donoso, “Review of Graham's A Pragmatist Philosophy of Life in Ortega y Gasset,” *Hispania* 78 (1995), p. 499.

12. E. d'Ors, *Glosari de Xenius* (Barcelona: Tallers Gràfics Montserrat, 1915) vol. II, pp. 373-375; and *El secreto de la filosofía* (Barcelona: Iberia, 1947), p. 12.

contrast between both readings has made an open reception of William James difficult, particularly his *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

2. Unamuno's Reading of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo was born in the Basque city of Bilbao in 1864. He studied philosophy and arts in Madrid, and stayed almost all his life in Salamanca, where he held a chair in Greek philology. For two periods (1901-14 and 1930-36) he was the rector of the University of Salamanca. Unamuno was a philosopher-poet of great learning, "who sought to save Spain with rationalized religiousness."¹³ He was deeply religious, but far from Catholic orthodoxy, as he had lost his faith in his youth. All his works were characterized by a strong philosophical struggle to reconcile reason with religion. After his son's death in 1897, Unamuno sought to reconquer his childhood faith, oscillating between retreating to orthodox Catholicism, converting to liberal Protestantism, or yielding to scepticism. As Orringer writes, "obsessed with mortality, Unamuno achieved philosophical maturity with a blend of liberal Protestant theology and the philosophies of James and Kierkegaard in his conception of 'the tragic sense of life'— the theme of his essays, novels, dramas, poetry and journalism."¹⁴

Unamuno is one of the most representative writers of the group known as the "Generación del 98" (from the year of Spain's defeat in the war with the United States over Cuba and the Philippines), a group deeply concerned with the future of Spain in the contemporary world. Unamuno's option was to "españolizar Europa" ["to hispanicize Europe"] in order to overcome the isolation of Spain. Unamuno's main philosophical works are *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* [Life of Don Quixote and Sancho] (1905), *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos* [The Tragic Sense of Life] (1911-12), and *La agonía del Cristianismo* [The Agony of Christianity] (1931). He died of a stroke in Salamanca on the last day of 1936.

As we have said, Unamuno had a great wealth of learning, and he also had a very well-stocked library of literature, philosophy and humanities in all languages, preserved now in the Casa-Museo Miguel de Unamuno in the University of Salamanca. That library contained over 100 volumes of prose, poetry and fiction by Americans, ranging from such nineteenth-century classics authors as Emerson and Thoreau to contemporary authors such as Pound and Wharton.¹⁵ Relevant for our present research are three works by William James that are kept in that library: *The Will to Believe* (1897), *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), and *Pragmatism* (1907). The copy of the *Varieties* corresponds to the first edition; there are hand-written pencil annotations by Unamuno in the margins of 32 pages of that

volume.

In Unamuno's works, over a span of forty years, there are 32 quotations from William James: 19 from *The Will to Believe*, 7 from *The Principles of Psychology*, 5 from *Varieties* and 2 from *Pragmatism*. His first quotation of the *Varieties*, a translation of Mrs. Annie Besant's quotation in page 27 of *Varieties*, corresponds to the year 1904; his last quotation in 1913 in his *The Tragic Sense of Life* is a remembrance of God as producer of immortality for the great majority of men, Kant, James, and Unamuno himself included.¹⁶ In Unamuno's copy the conclusion James draws in the *Varieties* is marked with six vertical lines and one horizontal: "Religion, in fact, for the great majority of our own race means immortality, and nothing else. God is the producer of immortality."¹⁷

The exploration of Unamuno's library and of his texts reveals himself as an avid reader of James. Unamuno feels himself congenial with James, whom he likes to describe as "the pragmatist, another hopeless Christian", and as "such a serious man, of so sincere spirit and so deeply religious."¹⁸ As we said before, Fernández's conclusion was that Unamuno's pragmatism was "original with respect to that of the American, from whom he absorbed only complementary features." However, in our opinion, it would be more accurate to say that there is not only a great similarity between the two thinkers on many issues and problems, but that James had a permanent impact on Unamuno's intellectual development. Very recently, Pedro Cerezo has studied more precisely the real scope of James's influence. According to Cerezo, for Unamuno the reading of William James in the first decade of the century was a turning point in the evolution of his mind, taking Unamuno away from metaphysical pessimism and turning his attention both to practical reason as well as to action that is able to give better orientation and a stronger sense to life.¹⁹

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¹³ N. A. Orringer, "Unamuno y Jugo, Miguel de (1864-1936)," in E. Craig, Ed. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), vol. 9, p. 519.

¹⁴ N. A. Orringer, "Unamuno y Jugo, Miguel de (1864-1936)," p. 519.

¹⁵ Cf. M. Thomas Inge, "Unamuno's Correspondence with North Americans: A Checklist." *Hispania* 53 (1970), p. 277. For a catalog of that library, see M. J. Valdés and M. Elena, *An Unamuno Source Book: A Catalogue of Readings and Acquisitions with an Introductory Essay on Unamuno's Dialectical Enquiry* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1973).

¹⁶ Cf. M. Unamuno, *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (Madrid: Renacimiento, 1911-12), pp. 10-11.

¹⁷ W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1985), p. 412.

¹⁸ M. de Unamuno, *Ensayos*, Bernardo G. de Cándamo, Ed. (Madrid: Aguilar, 1951), 3ª ed., vol I, p. 978 and p. 809.

¹⁹ Pedro Cerezo, *Las máscaras de lo trágico. Filosofía y tragedia en Miguel de Unamuno* (Madrid: Trotta, 1996), pp. 278-289.

James versus Nietzsche: Energy and Asceticism in James

by Sergio Franzese

At the end of the lecture on “The Value of Saintliness” in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,¹ William James explicitly refers to Friedrich Nietzsche as “the most inimical critic of the saintly impulses.”² James concludes:

Poor Nietzsche’s antipathy is itself sickly enough, but we all know what he means, and he expresses well the clash between the two ideals. The carnivorous-minded ‘strong man,’ the adult male and cannibal, can see nothing but mouldiness and morbidness in the saint’s gentleness and self-severity, and regards him with pure loathing. (*VRE*, p. 373)

James’s account of Nietzsche’s doctrine as a mere proponent for the strong versus the weak man is reductive and unfair. However, I think it is important to consider James’s view of Nietzsche less for what we can learn about Nietzsche than for what such an interpretation can tell us about James himself. While James uses Nietzsche as a representative of the most critical view on saintliness of his time, James’s criticism of Nietzsche is not an unreserved defense of saintliness. In fact, James’s analysis of the “type” of saint in *VRE* follows the guidelines of a psychological and strictly human and social ethical perspective, leaving out the issue of its religious worth (*VRE*, p. 356 and p. 377). Correspondingly, James’s analysis of the saint is therefore not less aware and critical than Nietzsche’s of the “all too human” and often morbid nature of the saint. James’s account of saintliness oscillates between the view of the saint as a hero and the saint as a monstrous aberration of the common human pattern.

According to James, the origin of sainthood is in a special sensitivity to certain kinds of emotions that trigger an immense expulsive power that allows for actions and behaviors energetically unaffordable for most of human beings. “The saintly character,” James says, “is the character for which spiritual emotions are the habitual center of energy” (*VRE*, p. 271). In other words, a saint is an individual in whom the spiritual interests are dominant over the others most of the time. This condition can lead to both heroic forms of abnegation and higher moral life as well as to forms of pathetic extravagance and lunacy. As for the ascetic life, the traditional mark of the saint, James has no problem suggesting that, as much as it can be a product of faith and desire for purity, it can also be the consequence of idiosyncratic or pathological states of mind.³

Moreover, the ascetic life can be explained through an energetic model: there are individuals that, like certain machines, need to be under high pressure to run best—“some need the sense of tension, of strong volition to make them feel alive and well” (*VRE*, p. 299). James continues:

Now when characters of this latter sort become religious, they are apt to turn the edge of their need of effort and negativity against their natural self; and the ascetic life gets evolved as a consequence. (*VRE*, p. 299)

The consequence of such an extreme temperament is a passionate attitude that, in an imperfectly balanced or uncharitable individual, can create fanaticism with all its unhappy consequences of intolerance and violence, as James notes in *VRE*, pp. 340-341. The one-sidedness, fanaticism, egotism, and extravagance which characterize the lives of many saints are unacceptable behavior to our modern moral sentiments, which demand that religion be associated with social righteousness and attention to the world’s welfare. The perfect conduct, James says, “is the relation of three terms: the actor, the objects for which he acts, and the recipient of the action” (*VRE*, p. 355). On the basis of such a moral standard, the saint’s actions need to be evaluated case by case. Later James notes how “we find that the individual saint may be well or ill adapted, according to particular circumstances” (*VRE*, p. 375). Whereas some saints are a full success according to the world’s standard and they are a major force in enhancement of social welfare (*VRE*, pp. 376-377), others are a failure and an easy prey for worldly “predators” and humorous writers. There is, in short, no absolute moral excellence in sainthood and spirituality is not a guarantee of righteousness.

Nietzsche’s analysis of saintliness, then, is not completely wrong. Rather, for James, Nietzsche’s characterization of sainthood as weakness and degeneration is biased and Nietzsche grasped just one of the possible perspectives on the phenomenon of sainthood. James’s view is that all excesses are vicious and, according to the layman’s ethical perspective, a healthier energetic equilibrium is more advantageous and ethically correct for our ordinary life. A well-balanced distribution of our interests and a proportionate development of the self are more advantageous and effective than a life of idiosyncratic bursts of overflowing energy. In addition, “strong man” is a relational standard. A person can be “strong” or energetic in several ways, and in the appropriate context a successful saint is as strong and well adjusted as a predator. The amount of energy expended, then, cannot be a suitable ethical standard. Instead we need to consider the context and fashion in which such energy is expended. These factors depend upon the dynamic of ideals that constitute the very meaning of human moral life.

The difference between James and Nietzsche is a metaphysical problem related to the question of energy or, more correctly, the question of the metaphysics of energy that James detects in Nietzsche’s analysis. For James,

1. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985). Hereinafter cited as *VRE*.

2. It is noteworthy that this is the only instance in which James publicly comments on Nietzsche, despite the fact James’s correspondence indicates that he was well acquainted with Nietzsche’s life and works.

3. James lists the characteristics of asceticism in *VRE*, pp. 296-297.

Nietzsche's contemptuous interpretation of the saint—the degenerate *par excellence*, the man of insufficient vitality—is the consequence of a common prejudice that assumes that “there can be only one intrinsically ideal type of human character: the best man absolutely and apart from the utility of his function, apart from economical considerations” (*VRE*, p. 374). The problem here is not Nietzsche's rejection of any attempt to correlate morality and utility, the “English morality” as Nietzsche called it. The real problem for James is implicit in the very nature of Nietzsche's “genealogical” inquiry in *The Genealogy of Morals* (the text James quotes in *VRE*). Searching for the “origin” of morality, Nietzsche falls into a monistic account of energy, according to which the saint is degenerate because the saint does not have the straightforward aggressiveness or energy of the “strong man.”

James's criticism, then, is not a defense of sainthood in itself, but rather another example of James's struggle against metaphysical monism. In James's perspective, Nietzsche uses a quantitative notion of “energy” or “will to power” as the ontological foundation of moral value. Understood in these terms, Nietzsche's genealogical inquiry becomes a *reductio ad unum* of the manifoldness of moral life, which James wants to preserve, and creates a sort of “metaphysics” of energy that turns into another kind of determinism.

In order to understand James's concern with the question of energy, and consequently the relevance of James's confrontation with Nietzsche on the metaphysics of energy, we need to consider the privileged role the question of energy plays in the development of James's late philosophy. Energy as the core of subjectivity appears in *VRE* as the key point of James's analysis of the phenomenon of conversion. James explains the “transformation” of personality, which constitutes the essence of conversion, as a permanent shift of the “centre of energy” (*VRE*, p. 194) from one group of interests and aims to another. In the chapter on “Conversion” James translates his earlier psychological theory of interest and self into energetic terms. The crucial point is James's identification of the real self with the “centre of energies” (*VRE*, p. 194) or the identification of what James called the “spiritual self” in *The Principles of Psychology*.⁴ As far as the spiritual self and what James earlier identified as “the stream of consciousness,” the recognition of the spiritual self as the “centre of energy” becomes metaphysically relevant since it defines the essence of the individual as energy. Further evidence is provided by James's identification of the center of energy with the “soul,” a term “not to be taken in the ontological sense”, but in phenomenal terms as Buddhists and Humeans do, that is, as “only a succession of fields of consciousness” (*VRE*, p. 195), namely, as the stream of consciousness.

James's energism later took the form of a project for social organization in an essay written in 1907, “The Energies [Powers] of Men.” In this essay, he noted:

If my reader will put together these two conceptions, first, that few men live at their maximum of energy, and second, that anyone may be in vital equilibrium at very different rates of energizing, he will find, I think, that a very pretty practical problem of national economy, as well as of individual ethics, opens upon his view. In rough terms, we may say that a man who energizes below his normal maximum fails by just so much to profit by his chance at life, and that a nation filled with such men is inferior to a nation run at higher pressure. The problem is, then, how can men be trained up to their most useful pitch of energy? And how can nations make such training most accessible to all their sons and daughters. This after all, is only the general problem of education, formulated in slightly different terms.⁵

Here energy appears as *the* ethical and political problem. Education as organization of energies is the core of ethics and politics, because the destiny of individuals and nations depends upon it.

It is precisely in view of the ethics of energy that Nietzsche's opposition between the strong and the weak individual becomes a problem for James in *VRE*, since it points to an ambiguity in James's energism itself.

In the energetic perspective, James's moral view appears as an opposition between activity, energy, action, maximization of energizing, and efficacy on the one hand, and passivity, entropy, waste of energy, degeneration, and decay on the other. An anticipation of such energetic moral insight can be found in James's earlier statement that moral action always entails a major expenditure of “moral energy,” for it is always the follow-up of a decision with effort “*in the line of greater resistance*.”⁶

Energy is also the distinction between James's “strenuous” and “easy-going” moods that he described in “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” published in 1891. The “strenuous” choice marks the apex of the ethical life because higher ideals are affirmed in it and, consequently, a greater amount of energy is deployed there. Thus, the dyad energy-entropy, activity-passivity, acquires in James a full moral value: the acts that display an increase or a surplus of energy are “good,” whereas those that show a low or decreasing level of energy are “bad” (e.g. *VRE*, p. 241 and p. 264).

Now, granted such a fundamental opposition, two questions come up: (1) How can James avoid the metaphysics of energy he criticizes in Nietzsche? (2) Provided that James can avoid a metaphysical foundation of the ethics of energy, what is the meaning and value of such an ethics? The quest for an answer to the first question forces James to a subtle “metaphysical” work that runs through his later writings. In particular, James tries to avoid the metaphysics of energy through a delicate work of definition, as for exam-

4. William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover Publications, 1950) vol. I, pp. 296-98. [Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1981/1983, pp. 283-85]

5. William James, “The Energies of Men.” New York: Moffat, Yard & Co., 1913; pp. 37-38. [published as “The Powers of Men” in *Essays in Morality and Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1982; p. 149)]

6. William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover Publications, 1950) vol. II, p. 548. [Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1981/1983, p. 1155]

ple in *Pragmatism* where he appeals to Ostwald's authority.⁷ This passage is echoed later with a footnote in *Some Problems of Philosophy*, where James says:

I omit saying anything in my text about 'energetics'. Popular writers often appear to think that 'science' has demonstrated a monistic principle called 'energy', which they connect with activity on one hand and with quantity on the other. So far as I understand this difficult subject, 'energy' is not a principle at all, still less an active one. It is only a collective name for certain amounts of immediate perceptual reality...It is not an ontological theory at all, but a magnificent economic schematic device for keeping account of the functional variations of the surface phenomena.⁸

The two passages point to the meaning of "energy" as a collective name, conceptual tool, or metaphor. Energy is a metaphor for the fact that *there is something that is really acting in the universe* or for the "live, active organic character of the universe." "Energy" is thus but another name for "activity"—any kind of activity taking place within the universe.

So far so good from the metaphysical perspective. Yet it is also true that, when speaking of energy in moral terms, James seems to understand energy in much less metaphorical terms, and prefers to follow the same romantic and heroic popular notion, according to which a very energetic man is a man who pursues his course undaunted by opposition. What James understands by energy here is the power that a person possesses to overcome obstacles. The amount of a person's energy is measured by the amount of obstacles that s/he can overcome, by the amount of work s/he can do. In other words, energy is efficacy of action but within a view of life as permanent struggle and fighting. In some way the Nietzschean "blonde beast" is still haunting James's energism. Whereas James rejects Nietzsche's metaphysics of energy, he allows something very similar to it in his own ethics. Nietzsche's energetic monism, with its opposition between the "strong" and the "weak" appears as the permanent risk of James's energetic perspective.

In order to avoid such a risk, James has to lead the ethics of energy within the broader realm of the spiritual world of the human ideals and of the construction of the cultural world against the destructive force of nature. Accordingly, in order to avoid a monistic metaphysics of energy and efficacy, energy cannot be a source of moral value, and the moral value of our activity cannot depend upon the quantitative evaluation of expenditure of energy.⁹ Instead, energy obtains its moral qualification from the kind of actions in which it is deployed to the extent that they are subservient

to human ideals.

This does not mean, however, the failure of James's ethics of energy. Even though energy cannot be the source of moral value, it is true that no real moral achievement is possible unless we learn how to organize and manage our energy, that is, unless we learn how to structure our life and how to preserve our action from its decay and passivity.

Here we find the answer to our second question about the meaning and value of the ethics of energy. The ethics of energy does not set moral aims and values; rather it is the way through which we become the masters and authors of our energy. To this extent, such an ethics is itself a value and it is good. It is "good" in the meaning James inherited from the classics, in particular Aristotle and Spinoza: good is what allows us to increase our power to act. James's ethics of energy then, does not aim to any good in the abstract; but it is good as a way of empowerment of the individual.

The ethics of energy, as creation, organization and management of individual and/or social human energies, is *asceticism*, understood in its primary original sense as preparation or training (ασκεω; ασκησις). Yet asceticism, which is at the core of James's ethics of energy, cannot be an absolute value. It is a subordinate and instrumental attitude to the achievement of ideals or the realization of the human world. Nietzsche, then, possibly said half a truth about the perversion of a saint's asceticism. There is something wrong with the ascetic ideal. What is wrong, however, is not that it is ascetic, but rather that it has become an ideal. In fact, as an ideal, ascetic discipline is perverted into a view of the world and a criterion for moral judgment instead of being adopted as a way of empowerment of human action and consequently as a condition for the construction of the human world. Actually the two thinkers look close at least in the recognition of the instrumental value of asceticism as a source of spiritual energy. Nietzsche wrote:

As we have seen, a certain asceticism, a severe and serene abstemiousness of the best intentions will be numbered among the conditions which are conducive to the highest spirituality, as well as to its most natural consequences: so it will from now on come as no surprise to learn that philosophers have always been favourably biased in their treatment of the ascetic ideal.¹⁰

James notes that "[t]hese saintly methods are...creative energies (*VRE*, p. 358). Later, he adds that "[r]epresentatively, then, and symbolically...asceticism must be acknowledged to go with the profounder way of *handling* the gift of existence" (*VRE*, p. 364).

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⁷ See William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1975), p. 93.

⁸ William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy: A Beginning of an Introduction to Philosophy* (Lincoln, Nebraska: U of Nebraska P, 1996); p. 206 n.1. [Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1979, p. 104, n. 11]

⁹ See William James, *The Letters of William James* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly P, 1920) vol. II, Letter from WJ to H. Adams, June 17, 1910, pp. 344-346.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic*. Douglas Smith, Translator. (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1996), p. 91.

Varieties of American Ecstasy

by Ramón del Castillo

James's pragmatic interpretation of religious experience was made possible because a variety of post-Christian ways of life which were already at work in the late 19th century United States. Because many Americans identified the essence of religion with the satisfaction of their vital needs, the "religious" could be taken in the lax but practical sense which James emphasized in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (hereinafter cited as *VRE*).¹ Since the early 1800s (around the so-called "Second Great Awakening") a lot of churches, sects, congregations, spiritual societies, religious clubs, and cultural associations in the U.S. were already fueled by the conviction that religion was an assistance designated to make this world easier and happier. I would say that, in a sort of dialectical interplay, James's own view of religion was inspired by an American way of living spirituality while, at the same time, some types of American religion (especially *religious individualism*) became transformed through James's unique genius in interpreting it. To some extent, indeed, it makes no sense to ask if James interpreted American post-Christianity in pragmatic terms or if he rather understood his own pragmatism in American post-Christian terms. As a pragmatic scholar always asks: Does it make any difference?

Secularization (whatever it can mean) was not in the U.S. a process at odds with the proliferation of fervors and faiths, sensibilities, feelings, or emotions which one could somehow continue to consider as religious. That religion was no longer endowed with the relative authority it once enjoyed does not necessarily imply its disappearance, but rather its diffusion or expansion through the whole of society to a point in which many social practices, styles of life, and ways of living (and particularly those which structure psyches) can be said to become "religious" or at least "spiritual." American Christianity, one could say, was like an Alka Seltzer in a big cup of water: it lost its solidity, but it gained ubiquity; it dissolved but somehow it spread across the whole social universe. Far from being contrary to the logic of *modernization*, the proliferation of cults, religious experiences, and spiritual groups would rather confirm that very logic just by including religion between the range of life's goods and commodities.

To my view James thought (as his admired John Stuart Mill already did) that industrial democracies such as the American displaced the old religion but also needed to invent substitutes for it which eventually operate as a moral cement of society. Neither positivist nor utilitarian creeds could by themselves inspire the kinds of belief which people still needed. The very Religion of Humanity for which Mill already claimed in *The Utility of Religion* was seriously considered by James as a secular substitute of religion:

Whether a God exist, or whether no God exist...we form at any rate an ethical republic here below. And the first reflection which this leads to is that ethics have a genuine and real foothold in an universe where the highest consciousness is human as in a universe where there is a God as well. 'The religion of humanity' affords a basis for ethics as well as theism. Whether the purely human system can satisfy the philosopher's demand as well as the other is a different question....²

In *VRE* James also explicitly recognized the substitutive function of some social movements, such as socialism and anarchism, whose utopian dreams of social justice are "analogous to the saint's belief in an existent kingdom of heaven" (*VRE*, p. 360). Both the Religion of Humanity and social movements, then, could be considered as examples of new secular *over-beliefs* (in James's own terms) in a moral order greater than individuals although they were essentially rooted in free and equal individuals. The whole secular social order, thus, is in some way "spiritualized": not only religious organization but service activities and civic loyalty could acquire a "religious" quality.

However, James's most perceptive consciousness of his age can be found in his description of the *variety* of ways in which Americans substituted new secular creeds for old supernatural faiths. Some kinds of enthusiasm, admiration, or devotion to diverse causes and ideals, indeed, could inspire and support people in their actions and life, while they induced in them an enduring attitude towards the whole universe which in many cases could be pragmatically analogous to religious zeal.

We find "evolutionism" interpreted thus optimistically and embraced as a substitute for the religion they were born in, by a multitude of our contemporaries who have either been trained scientifically, or been fond of reading popular science and who had already begun to be inwardly dissatisfied with what seemed to them the harshness and irrationality of the orthodox Christian scheme. (*VRE*, pp. 91-92)

As James says, the state of mind of followers of this optimistic creed "may by courtesy be called a religion" (*VRE*, p. 92) "for it is their reaction on the whole nature of things, it is systematic and reflective, and it loyally blinds them to certain inner ideals" (*Ibid*). They consider, indeed, the idea of God as being begotten in ignorance, fear, and lack of knowledge of Nature. These people also hate churches, prayers, hymns, sermons, and other pernicious things which teach us to rely on some supernatural powers. If James's example of this new type of "believer" (an example by Starbuck) were to die, he would rather die "with a hearty enjoyment of music, sport, or any other rational pastime" (*VRE*, p. 92). If asked what kind of things

¹. All *VRE* page references are to the original 1902 New York Longmans edition, reproduced by Penguin in 1982.

². William James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" in *The Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy* (New York: Longmans, 1897), p. 198.

work most strongly on his emotions, he would say:

Lively songs and music; Pianoforte instead of an Oratorio...Scott, Burns, Byron, Longfellow, especially Shakespeare...Of songs, the Star-spangled Banner, America, Marseillaise, and all moral and soul-stirring songs, but wishy-washy hymns are my detestation. I greatly enjoy nature, especially fine weather...walk...bicycle...I never go to church, but attend lectures when there are any good ones. (*VRE*, p. 93)

Popular evolutionism, interpreted as a new sort of religion of Nature, then, is an ingredient of new modern temperaments which could also happily read Browning and Whitman (what Santayana called "poetry of barbarism") or sing patriotic songs after climbing on a sunny Sunday morning.

James also mentions other new "sects" as the "New Thought" or "Mind-cure Movement," a plain belief in the curative and saving power of healthy-minded attitudes, an intuitive and practical "faith in faith," efficacy, hope, and trust whose doctrinal sources are nothing but the four Gospels, Emersonianism, Berkeleyan idealism, or even spiritism (*VRE*, p. 94). He also speaks on page 95 of the "Gospel of Relaxation," of the "Don't Worry movement," on p. 106 of Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science, as well as about many other new habits and attitudes whose extensive social spread could be due to the extremely practical interest of the American people in "concrete therapeutics" (*VRE*, p. 96).³ And maybe he could have added mesmerism, homeopathy, and Adventist dietetics such as John H. Kellogg's cornflakes to his list as American ways of fusions for the soul and the body, the spiritual and the material.⁴

One should notice that many of the tendencies which James classed as examples of healthy-mindedness were *from the start* connected with spiritual consumerism and utilitarian individualism.⁵ This means that, ironically, many of the new styles of spirituality which sometimes tried to work as a refuge from competitive capitalism, and which sometimes produced an ethics of solidarity, progressively proved to be too weak social agencies in the transformation of this very economical order.⁶ Religiosity of healthy-mindedness, thus, was not always

healthy in collective terms, no matter how much well-being or consolation it brought to individuals in their solitude or to groups in their isolation.

What might be more interesting is that, in addition to all those varieties of healthy-mindedness, James also considered in *VRE* other substitutes of religion which again exhibited two contradictory faces. What Leuba called the "faith-state"—James says—could be a good name for some kind of emotions of which conversion and saintliness would represent its extreme forms (see *VRE*, lectures IX and X), but which could also be present in more ordinary attitudes: a courage and a feeling that great and wondrous things are in the air; a readiness for great things or the sense that the world by its wonderfulness is apt for their production; an excitement which freshens vital powers and imparts endurance, zest, enchantment and glory to the common objects of life.⁷ All those things, James concludes,

would seem to be the undifferentiated germ of all the higher faiths. Trust in our own dreams of ambition, or in our country's expansive destinies, and faith in the providence of God, all have their source in that onrush of our sanguine impulses, and in that sense of the exceedingness of the possible over the real. (*VRE*, p. 506)

James, indeed, ends Lecture III ("The Reality of the Unseen") of *VRE* with an impressive description of new forms of *eagerness, fervor, rejoice or exultation* which pragmatically also would replace religion:

an attitude might be called religious, though no touch were left in it of sacrifice or submission, no tendency to flexion, no bowing of the head. Any "habitual and regulated admiration," says Professor J. R. Seeley [*Natural Religion*, Boston 1886] "is worthy to be called a religion"; and accordingly he thinks our Music, our Science, and our so-called 'Civilization' as these things are now organized and admiringly believed in, from the more genuine religions of our time. Certainly the unhesitating and unreasoning way in which we feel that we must inflict our civilization upon 'lower' races, by means of Hotchkiss guns, etc., reminds one of nothing so much as of the early spirit of Islam spreading its religion by the sword. (*VRE*, p. 77)

Reading passages such as this, one should seriously consider James's sharpness and irony, as if he sarcastically warns of the dangers which some secular creeds could irremediably imply: parochial pride, chauvinism, intolerance. Nor should one forget that, for better and for worse, American democracy itself always had something of a religious quality. As James himself declared:

³ On religion as a therapy and therapies as substitute of religion see R. Bellah, R. Madsen, et al., *Habits of Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985), Chapter 9. I would also consider Richard Sennet's works, especially when he studied the progressive interpretation of social relations in psychological terms and the idea of the public realm—job, politics—as the mirror of the self. See his articles "Narcissism and Modern Culture," "Destructive Gemeinschaft" and "What Tocqueville Feared," or *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1974).

⁴ Nowadays, indeed, many assertive therapies, from aerobics to New Age, from ecology to yoga, from Buddhism to macrobiotics, from sports to Scientology, could be the very postmodern legacy (the so-called "Third Great Awakening") of the modern world which James once saw being born.

⁵ See Bellah, *Habits of Heart*, chapter 5, on the economical dimension of the culture of therapy.

⁶ See Lawrence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford U P, 1994).

⁷ I paraphrase *VRE*, p. 506, footnote. Curiously, James bases his description of "faith-state" from lines in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

Varieties of Religious Ecstasy by Ramón del Castillo

Democracy is a kind of religion, and we are bound not to admit its failure. Faiths and utopias are the noblest exercise of human reason.⁸

Our nation has been founded in what we may call our American religion, baptized and reared in the faith that a man requires no master to take care of him, and that common people can work out their salvation well enough together if left free to try.⁹

In addition to the diverse religions, cults, or gods of any individual or group, then, American religion would keep Americans united by means of some articles of faith and collective celebrations, rituals and symbols such as “The Star-Spangled Banner,” “America,” Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July, and Memorial Day.¹⁰ American democracy, in fact, allows individuals to believe in what they want or to attend the sect, church, or association of their own choice. In other words, religion is an essentially private affair separated from the State. However, over and above the religions or cults of any one individual or any one group, there are also some “religious” ideas that are compatible with that very religious plurality. Maybe the belief that men have been created equal (in the way invoked by the American Declaration of Independence), Biblical references to millennial hope as invoked by Lincoln, latitudinarian epigrams on individual freedom and sovereignty as invoked by Emerson, or principles as expressed in the First Amendment to the Constitution.¹¹ This “civil religion” cannot be separated from the State since it helps to promote habits, virtues, and values which foster Americans with a relatively common identity that makes other differences (religious, ethnic, and cultural) less threatening.¹²

But as James ironically saw, just because American democracy could be a sort of “religion,” it also could degenerate into a *theocracy*, making America’s own destiny the object of American citizens’ adoration. In other words, by identifying love to God with love to your own country, in

dying for your country you become a martyr; violating laws is impious; execrating a criminal is venting God’s wrath on him; and being a foreigner is just to be an infidel or an unbeliever.¹³

James’s interpretation of healthy-minded spirituality and secular “religions” was extremely individualistic. In effect, he conceived of them basically as a means of realization of different and even *conflicting* needs and ideals of individuals:

Is the existence of so many religious types and sects and creeds regrettable? I answer “No” emphatically. And my reason is that I do not see how it is possible that creatures in such different positions and with such different powers as human individuals are, should have exactly the same functions and the same duties. No two of us have identical difficulties, nor should we be expected to work out identical solutions....So a “god of battles” must be allowed to be the god for one kind of person, a god of peace and heaven and home, the god for another....we live in partial systems, and that parts are not interchangeable in the spiritual life. (*VRE*, p. 487)¹⁴

We surely could ask: Did James exaggerate or overestimate the *individualistic* basis of American religions and religious-like movements? I would emphatically answer in the negative, although we certainly should distinguish between radical individualism as the Jamesian and other kinds of individualism. Following Robert Bellah, one could note that even those American ways of interpreting religion that emphasize community and external authority do *not* exclude personal freedom, autonomy as their central values. On the contrary, it is supposed that commandments and other norms liberate individuals from constrictions and allow them to be truly autonomous. The point, then, does not consist just in opposing religious *individualism* to *collectivism*, but rather in contrasting different ways of interpreting individuality.¹⁵

I have said that Christianity dissolved like an Alka Seltzer but at the bottom of the cup a sediment is always left, a residue which I would be tempted to identify with the Protestant affirmation of the immediate relation of the individual with God. In James’s own terms, no matter in how many and even contradictory ways the divine-like can be interpreted, each individual feels that he or she has a

8. William James, “The Social Value of the College-Bred” quoted by Richard Rorty in his *Achieving Our Country* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1998), p. 9. See page 10 for Rorty’s references to American religion in Herbert Croly’s *The Promise of American Democracy*.

9. William James, “Robert Gould Shaw: Oration by William James” in *Essays in Religion and Morality*, (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1982), p. 66. I thank Randall Albright for this quotation and many opportune comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

10. See R. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America” in *Daedalus*, 96 (1967) and *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (NY, Seabury Press, 1975). Also: Walzer, M., *On Toleration*, (New Haven: Yale U P, 1997) “Civil Religion,” pp. 76-80.

11. See C. Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*. (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 2002), pp. 67-69. I thank Carlos Thiebaut for calling my attention to Taylor’s book and other suggestions.

12. Just to be effective (that is, to facilitate differences), this common “religion” needs to be grounded more in sentiments, vague convictions, celebrations, historical narratives, exemplary figures, celebratory occasions and memorial rituals than in elaborated, firm, and distinct bodies of doctrine. As Walzer says: “beliefs come into opposition far more readily than stories do, and one celebration doesn’t deny, cancel or refute another” in *On Toleration*, pp. 76-77.

13. See in *The Utility of Religion* how Mill talks of Rome as an example of a quite sincere object of religious admiration by practical people, the Roman people, something that, by the way, could have incited Santayana to make more sarcastic comments on America as a object of religious devotion. See “James as Reformer” and “Social and Political Sentiments” in Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James* ([1948] Vanderbilt U P, 1996) on discord between James and Santayana. To understand James’s own anti-imperialism, I would also bear in mind Henri Bergson’s ideas on imperialism as a degenerated mysticism in his *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, Chapter IV.

14. See also *VRE*, p. 491 and pp. 499-502.

15. See Bellah, *Habits of Heart*, chapter 9, section on “Internal and External Religion.”

personal relation with it. Privacy, immediacy, and authenticity constitute the residual structure of feeling in many of the cases James considered. To take seriously ideals, dreams, or whatever else can substitute God is to take them inwardly. The religion of the private self and the privatization of the religious go hand in hand. Any belief in something, no matter how vague, can work as a help tool for personal fulfillment, self-reliance, and self-realization; it can also be an effective means to satisfy the will to be yourself or to fulfill the right to believe in yourself.

Indeed, both religious pluralism and the incipient culture of psychotherapy which James associated with healthy-mindedness could be forms of what Bellah would call “expressive individualism.” This kind of individualism claims that each person has a “unique core of experience which should unfold or be expressed if individuality is to be realized.”¹⁶ In religious terms, that results in the Jamesian idea that the divine is ultimately an exaltation of the inner self, that each individual has a private relation with whatever he or she considers as divine. This first-hand experience is more important than churches, sects, religious authorities, ecclesiastic organizations, theological bodies of doctrine, official dogma, and so on. The group never overrides individuals’ experiences. Intellectual content is secondary to emotional life.

However, accepting that religion and its substitutes are ultimately questions of private experience does not mean that they are taken as contrary to *collective* experience, but only contrary to some ways of understanding it. Jamesian religious individualism certainly can *override* but does *not* necessarily *exclude* communal commitment, shared activities, affiliation or participation in groups and communities. Individual spirituality is not incompatible with *voluntary* association although it can transcend them. Expressive individualism claims that each person has the right to express himself or herself differently, but also that this core of uniqueness is not necessarily alien to others. In Whitmanesque terms, for example, the inner self *does* merge, interfuse or unite with others spontaneously, empathetically. In James’s own terms, individual experiences can be enhanced by the sense that something is shared, although each of these experiences are essentially egotistical and radically different from person to person.¹⁷ Emotions such as communion, joy, solidarity, love, togetherness, cordiality, friendship, or camaraderie can tint everyone’s actions with common mood. James, then, did not deny ways of integrating individuals into larger communities, although he certainly saw communities mainly as contingent or transitory results of the connections of individuals, and not—as Charles Taylor rightly says—what in some way constitute or are these connections.¹⁸

¹⁶ Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, p. 335. See also chapter 2 on Whitman as genuine representation of expressive individualism.

¹⁷ See James’s idea of sympathy in “On A Certain Blindness of Human Beings.” The idea of radical polytheism (see *VRE*, PostScript, p. 525) does not also exclude an universe as a collection of selves with different degrees of inclusiveness.

Of course, in the U.S. there were and there are churches, religious practices which demand the priority of the group over the individual believers and that do not understand community as a mere aggregate of individuals.¹⁹ But as sociologists have insinuated, many Americans (especially from the cultivated middle and upper class strata) conceived and still conceive religion or its analogies in terms of an expressive individualism contrary to corporate and hierarchical orders, not to *any* kind of common way of living.²⁰ The difference, maybe, is that James still trusted eccentric religious individualism as a strenuous and belligerent *moral* force, while throughout the 20th century individualism was aestheticized and customized to the extent of rendering fruitful connections between individuals too often isolated in their private ecstasy or paralyzed by their own anxiety of self-realization more difficult to achieve. This emphasis on the personal basis of religion caused many movements to compete in the “spiritual” market. Contrary to James’s own expectations, *experience* (and above all “spontaneous,” “intuitive,” “eccentric,” or “extravagant” experiences), gradually became a motive for simple escapism and narcissism rather than an active resistance against the tyranny of majorities or a “heretical sort of *innovation*” (*VRE*, p. 334, my italics).²¹

James’s own contradictions, however, are what ironically make him unique. In favor of his expressive individualism, one could notice that stronger ways of conceiving community and corporate life have not necessarily inspired either more resistance to consumerism or a better way of connecting American souls too often absorbed in their respective rigid group-identity. But that is another story.

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¹⁸ Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today*, p. 24. Taylor also connects more or less directly Jamesian individualism with an “expressive individualism” which did not desert instrumental or utilitarian individualism, but rather adds to them.

¹⁹ See Walzer, *On Toleration*, p. 68 and ff. and Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today*, chapters 1, 3, and 4. In *Habits of Heart*, Bellah suggests that in many cases it is precisely by reaction against the lax and indefinite character of religious individualism that many Americans turn to external, institutionalized religions. Americans, he comes to suggest, could be irremediably condemned to oscillate between those two extremes: internal and external religiosity, which as degenerated forms would respectively be egotistic individualism and parochial sectarianism.

²⁰ Bellah, *Habits of Heart*, chapter 9, “Church, Sect and Mysticism.”

²¹ Taylor notes the resulting structure of this individualism, which is not that of a common action, but rather of a mutual display, especially as consumer’s market grew up. (*Varieties of Religion Today*, p. 80 and ff.)

The Athlete's Surrender: Activity and Passivity in The Varieties of Religious Experience

by Felicitas Kraemer

Self-Surrender, Passivity, and Dependence as Characteristic Moments of Religious Conversions

Since Kant's Copernican turn, philosophy has stressed the active moment of our perception and knowledge. For pragmatism as well, the activity of human beings plays a major role in shaping the world. We do not find a "ready-made" universe. We are contributors, active participants, or even co-creators in its constitution. In Germany, pragmatism was widely misunderstood by Max Scheler, among others, as a merely activist and subjective-idealist philosophy of the Fichtean or Berkeleyan type. Scheler went so far as to say that pragmatists have only a "knowledge of control" ("Herrschafts—und Leistungswissen," i.e. knowledge of controlling or conquering nature), but no "knowledge of essence" ("Bildungswissen" or "Wesenswissen") and no "knowledge of salvation" ("Erlösungswissen").¹

From this point of view, it is surprising that James, in his philosophy of religion, favors a passive state of mind, the state of religious self-surrender. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,² James even calls self-surrender the "vital turning point of religious life" (*VRE*, p. 173 [p. 210]), since self-surrender is the crucial step in conversions. The distinction between the so-called "volitional" and the involuntary conversion is only a gradual one, "not radical" (*VRE*, p. 170 [p. 206]). Self-surrender is described as "a state of mind...in which the will to assert ourselves and hold our own has been replaced by a willingness to close our mouths and be as nothing in the floods and waterspouts of God" (*VRE*, p. 46 [p. 47]). In its most dramatic form, it means a total collapse of the personal will and intellectual system, a physical and mental breakdown that is usually caused by complete exhaustion. This state can lead from helpless submission and desperation to an easy state of "tranquil-mindedness" (*VRE*, p. 230 [p. 285]). James contrasts the motif of religious self-surrender

with the attitude of ongoing "effort" as the distinguishing character of morality.

The moralist must hold his breath and keep his muscles tense.... But the athletic attitude...inevitably...break[s] down even in the most stalwart when the organism begins to decay, or when morbid fears invade the mind. (*VRE*, p. 45 [p. 46])

The so-called "moral athlete" is the "strong man" or "strong woman" who tries to enhance the good in the world and to actualize her ideals. But in the face of her mortality and vulnerability, her will and strength turn out to be finite. As James puts it: "[W]e are all such helpless failures in the last resort" (*VRE*, p. 46 [p. 47]). In this moment of total helplessness, the athlete is forced to relax, whether she wants to or not. The ego as door-keeper of our consciousness has given up. Higher energies can flow into the emptied mind and provide it with new strength and insight. We are confronted with a reality bigger and mightier than our personal willful self. James leaves it open whether the energies stem from the subliminal realm of the individual or whether they are higher forces of a "supernatural...Deity" (*VRE*, p. 174 [p. 211]).

The paradigm of self-surrender is mystic experience, in which there is a union of subject and object. A person perceives continuity between her personal self and a wider or even a divine self (*VRE*, p. 400 [p. 507] and p. 405 [p. 515]). As soon as the threshold between consciousness and the subliminal is lowered or broken, the individual personality can be dissolved in a bigger whole. Impersonal energy is instilled into the emptied mind. Selectivity of vision, personal will, and self-awareness vanish. The individual personality is washed away "in the floods and waterspouts of God" (*VRE*, p. 46 [p. 47]).

Towards a Religious Realism: The Perceptible Limits of Pragmatist Activism

At this point, I want to focus on some philosophical consequences drawn from James's emphasis of self-surrender in the very moment of religious conversion. One could easily compare this feature of James's perspective on religious experience with Schleiermacher's notion of the "feeling of absolute dependence" ("schlecht-hinnige Abhängigkeit").³ This seems to shed light on a certain form of religious realism in

1. Max Scheler, *Erkenntnis und Arbeit, Gesammelte Werke* 8, *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft*, 2, durchges. Aufl., (Bern/München: Francke 1960), pp. 200-205. I wish to thank Manfred Frings for his help with these references.

2. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1985), hereinafter cited as *VRE*. Optional citation to the original Longmans pagination in 1902, reproduced in the Penguin 1982 edition, is in brackets.

3. Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, *Der Christliche Glaube 1821/22*, Studienausgabe Band 1 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter 1984), see especially §9 and §§ 36-76. I wish to thank Harry Wardlaw for this reference.

VRE. A great deal has been written on the question of whether James is a realist or not and, if yes, what kind of realism he supports.⁴ I will focus on a simplified interpretation of religious realism in the terms of human activity and passivity.

In its simplest version, epistemological realism can be defined in terms of passivity of the human mind and, at the same time, of the independence of the object known. Realism in terms of religion can mean that the object of religious experience, the Divine, is independent of human knowledge and acts on a person's mind.

In our ordinary states of mind, whenever we perceive an object, our mind never stays entirely passive. Rather, it actively applies categories and other tools of understanding to the object perceived. Meanwhile, the very moment of religious conversion is characterized by its ineffability (*VRE*, p. 302 [p. 380]). During the experience and even when it is over, we are unable to put it into adequate words. This points towards a certain temporary decontextualization happening to the mind, the person's common sensical categories of explanation have been given up. Since the object of religious perception cannot be felt by the particular senses, it is only vaguely and generally describable as "something there." Religious objects show no definable properties and thus are "non-entities in point of *whatness*" (*VRE*, p. 55 [p. 58]). The person just holds her tongue and even her mind's conceptualizing capacity stays silent for a moment. This extraordinary pre-logical state could be interpreted as the level of utmost passivity of the human mind, since "something else" has taken hold of it, exceeding its normal capacities. Therefore, religious self-surrender could be called the moment where the limit of volition and human activity becomes perceptible. The person experiences the very edge of her willfulness where the self at its utmost end meets something that feels like a non-Ego. It is the perceptible borderline to the "other side," the twilight zone where civilization shifts into wilderness and our consciousness switches into the shadows of the subliminal.

James leaves open what the Divine is by its nature and origin and just defines it as any "godlike" object (*VRE*, p. 36 [p. 34]) to which the individual responds "solemnly and gravely" (*VRE*, p. 39 [p. 38]). According to *VRE*, the Divine might well be the farthest pole of a continuous prolongation of the individual's subliminal realm (*VRE*, p. 403 [p. 512]). For James, it is possible that what we perceive in a religious experience goes back to the influence of an unknown part of ourselves. Nevertheless, this subliminal continuation of our ordi-

nary consciousness is not subject to our volition. Our subliminal self with its drives and instincts is not subject to our willful control and can even undermine or dominate our willful intentions. Whatever the Divine might be, a higher force or a "wider self" with which the "conscious person is continuous" (*VRE*, p. 173 [p. 515]), the Divine turns out to be independent of our willfulness in the crucial respect. It becomes clear that James rejects any subjectivist-idealist misrepresentation by underscoring the activity and independence of the Divine.

An important consequence from this realist interpretation is that we do not have any right of disposal on the objects of religious experiences. Whatever the Divine is, it is not subject to our will, and we cannot play fast and lose with it. The Deity is not at our disposal, neither for an individual nor for a country. If the Divine is independent of our will, it is likely to affect *and influence us* and it is never subject to our intentions. Therefore, the Deity's name should not be taken in vain and not be used for political purposes.

Furthermore, from the realist perspective and in the *VRE* frame of experimental psychology, the Divine defies being tested and verified in scientific contexts. This makes the Divine a very special object of inquiry; its presence is no phenomenon springing from a laboratory examination. You cannot forecast it, there are no sufficient conditions for its manifestation, and there is no way to prompt its appearance. How far can something Divine be brought out by analysis? Can it be engendered by our experiments? James leaves open whether it is possible to produce or prompt any genuine religious experience by the use of "intoxicants and anaesthetics" or by performing certain techniques and exercises like yoga. (*VRE*, 307 [p. 387] and p. 317 [p. 400]). Anyway, the religious realist who maintains the causal and epistemological independence of the Divine would certainly deny this possibility.

Against a Narrow Realist Interpretation: Human Activity and Individual Perceptions Shape the Face of the Divine

After this brief sketch of some points of a realist interpretation based on the phenomenon of self-surrender, I will now turn to the part of human activity. In the "Religion and Neurology" and "The Value of Saintliness" lectures, James sets the agenda of *VRE* as an effort to find criteria for the spiritual evaluation of religious experience by examining its worth for life. This analysis of practical value focuses on the external *results* rather than on the internal "roots" and causes of religious belief. Since the ideal part of reality, the religious "Reality of the Unseen" (*VRE*, p. 51 [p. 53]), is for James continuous with our visible reality, beliefs have

⁴ See, for example, Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1990), pp. 351-372.

to prove their long run efficacy and valuable effects in our concrete and social life. Although the paradigm of self-surrender is that of a mystic union with the intangible, James nonetheless argues that the worth of spiritual ideals depends on their visible and actual value for *this* life. In other words, the pragmatic dimension in *VRE* clearly points out the relevance of human activity as a measurement for the legitimacy of religious truth-claims. According to the pragmatist doctrine that any belief involves a readiness to *act*, a belief can be measured by its capacity to improve individual or common well-being. What we perceive in a religious experience later on will be evident in action.

Meanwhile, the interaction between the object of our belief and our activity works vice versa as well. Since for the reality of the Divine, we play an important role in several respects. First, for James, a divine entity in which no human being believes would not be actual at all. James the pragmatist says: "God is real since he produces real effects" (*VRE*, p. 407 [p. 517]). I would paraphrase this as: "A Deity is real if it produces real effects." Second, apart from this vital function human beings have for the Divine, our confidence could even help the Divine to trust in its own plans (*VRE*, p. 408 [p. 519]). Our beliefs could enhance its self-confidence and our feelings could act as resonators. Although the Divine is not at our disposal in relevant respects, it might react to us and mirror our feelings like a fellow human being. So it might be susceptible to feedback strategies, to our active encouragement and to self-fulfilling prophecies. In this way, our emotions, intentions, hopes, and ideals could infiltrate the Divine, feeding it like a queen bee. By referring to it, we qualitatively enrich and shape its property-structure. The sum of its properties seems to be successively made up by the amount of all individual persons having religious experiences. For this, every singular attitude is needed, every subjective feeling has to fulfill its task. The "total human consciousness of the divine" consists of all our private feelings, each forming "a syllable in human nature's total message" (*VRE*, p. 384 [p. 487]). The Divine exists within time, being neither eternal nor omniscient nor "ready-made" in advance. As a temporal, historical entity, it is essentially conditioned by its interactive exchange with *us*. (*VRE*, p. 406 [pp. 516-517]) Maybe it even unfolds itself as a totality of answers to the most desperate questions we raise in the dark moments of our lives.⁵

To sum this up, human beings turn out to be *co-creators*⁶ not only of the world we live in, but also of their own objects of worship. As far as epistemology,

James's emphasis on our activity could be considered as an idealist element. To a certain degree, the Divine's features seem to depend on how we human beings perceive it.

There are intriguing parallels between James's conception of human co-creation and the task of mankind in natural religions of the kind Bruce Chatwin points out his ethnological study *The Songlines*.⁷ Some natural religions believe they are able to create or re-create the earth by way of their rites and customs. For James, in a similar way, *we* play an active part in the development of our world and are important factors for the existence and the growth of our Deities.

Activity and Passivity as Double-Aspect of the "Full Fact"

Finally, I will consider how all the active and passive elements mentioned might correspond with James's two-sided conception of reality as the "*full fact*" (*VRE*, p. 393 [p. 499]). For James, what is real must have an objective as well as an irreducible subjective element. Today, philosophy of mind would refer to the latter as "qualia." Qualia determine what it is like for an individual to have a certain experience, in this case a religious one. Reality is only given to us in the form of qualitative subjective experience, subjectivity being the inevitable transmitter of objectivity. Personal destinies "are "the only absolute realities" to which we ever have access, as James puts it (*VRE*, p. 396 [p. 503]). Therefore, "a *full fact*" means reality in its *concrete* and actualized form, bringing about "concrete actuality" (*VRE*, p. 393 [p. 499]) in someone's life. Scientific objectivity, on the other hand, neglects qualitative, emotional aspects which provide specific relevance for personal biographies. Depersonalized science does not deal with the full amount of reality but with pale and dead abstractions. The symbols of scientific explanation substituting the vivid facts of real life provide a "reality only half made up" (*VRE*, p. 393 f. [p. 499]). Nevertheless, subjective experience alone does not engender the "full fact" as long as it does not lead to externalizations, such as actions and practical consequences. This latter feature brings in the pragmatic maxim according to which what is real must have real effects. For James, concrete reality demands an objective and publicly accessible aspect, a subjective aspect,

⁵. See William James, *The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge MA: Harvard U P, 1975), pp. 36 and 60 on the importance of raising questions for the constitution of reality: "when once the question is raised."

⁶. This *conception of co-creation* (German "mit-schöpferische Handlung") is mentioned by Hermann Deuser on p.196 of "Zur Achten Vorlesung" in *William James, Pragmatismus, Klassiker Auslegen* 21, Klaus Oehler, Ed. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2000), pp. 185-212.

⁷. See Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines* (New York: Penguin Books 1989), p. 14.

a moment of self-reflection, and it must exhibit practical results. In what follows I focus on what James calls the objective and the subjective elements of experience (*VRE*, p. 393 [pp. 498-499]).

The irreducibly two-sided structure of reality with its subjective as well as objective aspects can be applied to the question of passivity and activity in the religious context. From this perspective, the Divine turns out to be an *ens realissimum* ("primal reality") in James's sense of the full amount of reality (*VRE*, p. 39 [p. 38]). In his third lecture, "The Reality of the Unseen," James points out that his correspondents consider the objects of their religious experiences as the most real ones they ever have perceived, since these objects have the strongest impact on our sense of reality (*VRE* pp. 55-56 [pp.60-61]). As pointed out before, religious experience includes passive receptivity of the individual that feels overwhelmed by the Divine in the moment of conversion. On the other hand, the highest level of reality also requires an active response or even contribution by the subject.

The required active response follows the moment of religious experience. The "new-born" person enters the social world again and becomes a real agent, being able to transform her newly gained energy and insight into action. Thus reality as "a *full* fact," embodied and exemplified in the double-aspect structure of the Divine, can be understood as an interaction of passivity and activity, of Divine objectivity and human subjectivity.

From an epistemological point of view, this double-aspect structure of the real and of the Divine prevents a strict dichotomy of some sorts of realism and idealism. In realism the object is prior and the sole spring of activity. In the subjective forms of idealism, the subject plays the active part and is the independent source of reality. James's understanding of the interaction and interdependence of both poles fits neither into the scheme of a strict realist nor in a strict idealist pattern.

What usually is perceived in a religious experience is a continuity with the Divine. In the last consequence, even the distinction between passivity and activity which I have previously made turns out to be a continuity of taking and giving. The active and the passive attitude of mind can not be regarded as a simple opposition. Rather, both aspects of religious experience and of the Divine merge into a flowing continuum between the human mind and the Deity, perceptible as a real relation and visible as human activity. By quoting Starbuck, James compares the moment of religious experience with the joyful absorption of the agent in her action:

An athlete...sometimes awakens suddenly to an understanding of the fine points of the game and to a real enjoyment of it, just as the convert awakens to an

appreciation of religion. If he keeps on engaging in the sport, *there may come a day when all at once the game plays itself through him—when he loses himself in some great contest*. In the same way, a musician may suddenly reach a point in which pleasure in the technique of the art entirely falls away, and in some moment of inspiration he becomes the instrument through which the music flows. (*VRE* 170), [p. 206], italics added]

This is why, finally, I want to point to a figure in *VRE* that embodies this very continuum or mutual absorption of activity and cheerful passivity that James calls the "friendly continuity of the ideal power with our own life" (*VRE*, p. 220 [p. 273]). It is *the saint* who reconciles and combines mystic self-surrender with social and political activism. She embraces the public as well as the merely private sphere of religious experience. On the one hand, she obeys God's will and her life is an ongoing exercise of self-surrender or even self-sacrifice.⁸ She is uninterested in competition and self-preservation. Therefore, she could be described as a circuit of impersonal energy, resulting in action. Despite her personal modesty, her ideals and charity function as a constructive "ferment" for a better society. For James, the saint exemplifies the creative and regenerative power of non-resistance and peaceful mindedness which can be "far more powerfully successful than force or wordly prudence" (*VRE*, pp. 285-286 [pp. 357-358]). In this way, the saint helps to actualize and realize the continuity between the individual and the "wider self" by making the Divine forces bearing fruits *in this world*.

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⁸ See *VRE* Lectures XI, XII, and XIII on the saintly virtues.



William James

by Gerhard Richter

one of 48 Portraits (1971/72)

Work Index Number 324/1-48, size 70 x 50 cm



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Circumscription of the Topic by Sylvia Gil (2003)



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Conversion by Sylvia Gil (2003)



The Divided Self in Reconstruction

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