



WILLIAM JAMES STUDIES

SPRING 2019 • VOLUME 15 • NUMBER 1



SPECIAL ISSUE – JOHN J. McDERMOTT: IN MEMORIAM
Guest Editor: Charles R. Carlson

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William James Studies is indexed and abstracted in EBSCO, JSTOR, MLA International Bibliography, and The Philosopher's Index.

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THE McDERMOTT EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE

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Professor John J. McDermott died on September 30th, 2018. When I discussed this special issue with him before he died, he was intrigued to find out what submissions we would receive. Alas, he was only able to read one of the finished essays, but I wager he would be encouraged that every contribution to this issue is from one of his former students. Some of these students go all the way back to his early New York City days in the 1960s and '70s, and others are from some of the last Texas classrooms he filled with his presence before his death. Many of the essays in this issue directly discuss McDermott's contribution to James studies, but they also contain stories, anecdotes, testimonies, and examples of cultural and lived moments of experience that McDermott contended were essential to understanding the beating aesthetic heart of American philosophy, and William James in particular.

John J. McDermott had a singular and profound impact on the trajectory of classical American philosophy. His reintroduction of primary texts through edited volumes of James, Peirce, Dewey, and Royce, as well as his role in the foundation of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, produced the groundwork for the contemporary revival of American philosophy. Of particular

note for this special issue of *William James Studies* are his contributions to William James scholarship, including *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, first published in 1967, his role as General Editor for the twelve volumes of *The Correspondence of William James*, his many articles and essays on James, and his unique application of radical empiricism to the modern world. This issue includes his last published essay on James. In combination with the tens of thousands of students who passed through his classrooms over his sixty-seven yearlong teaching career, McDermott has both shaped and nurtured the study of James and the larger scene of American philosophy.

At the time of his death, McDermott was University Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and Humanities in Medicine at Texas A&M University. He was also Presidential Professor for Teaching Excellence, Regents Professor, and Piper Professor. McDermott was the quintessential American intellectual, and his research and publication contributions will indefinitely echo in the discipline. Yet, his legendary reputation as a pedagogue possibly surpasses even his purely scholarly efforts, although as many of the essays in this volume contend, the two were often conjoined.

Speaking now of my own experiences of Professor McDermott, I have been, and continue to be, his student. From 2007 until his death, I had the good fortune of working with him on almost a daily basis in a variety of capacities. I first spent five years as his research assistant, and one of the responsibilities of that position involved archiving his letters and correspondence. McDermott was many things, but near the top of the list must be “archivist.” Not counting what has been included since his death, his personal archive contains 436 boxes. They are well-packed, and meticulously organized, labeled, and catalogued. One “upshot” of holding this position was that I was in contact with hundreds of former students. I remain continually astounded by the gratitude expressed by students who made contact after not having done so for five, ten, thirty, or even sixty years. Most were simply writing a letter to McDermott to say how they have carried their experience with him throughout their lives. It would not be appropriate to discuss any of them specifically,

but many expressed general themes that are illustrative. I already admired and knew that he was a great man before I came to Texas A&M to study with him, but the letters from former students solidified for me the suspicion that he was also a good man. Intimidating, gruff, free to speak his mind and challenge what he saw as injustice, I knew his passion, but the letters showed that he had been effective not only in helping his students grow, but he also empowered them individually and in their service to others. These testimonials came almost weekly. In a time where assessment has cast a gloomy statistical shadow over academia, I can think of no greater outcome than to have a student continue to draw inspiration from a classroom after years of genuine reflection on what went on there. So, what did go on in his classrooms? Many of the essays in this issue offer takes on the magic of the McDermott classroom, but I can't miss a chance to offer my own brief attempt to try to explain.

McDermott was a master of the content, of course, and he was famous for his lecture style and the unique community he built in each course. It was also the *how* of McDermott: How he treated students and their worries, concerns, and problems. How he inspired and encouraged them to challenge and know themselves. His recognition that our students' lives are, without exception, difficult and full of struggle, and so we ought to be kind to them. How he modeled what it meant to be an authentic intellectual, a serious academic, engaged and thoughtful and always looking to help others, no matter what they needed help with. McDermott's special disposition was ubiquitous, and inseparable even from casual conversations, which, for me, were often punctuated by a poke in the chest and a command that whatever experience we had just shared was an important one. Whether the conversation was about why you should not trust a 1941 DeSoto to get you to your dissertation defense on time, or what character traits make a good point guard, the link between his pedagogy and his overall way of being in the world was unbroken. The inseparability of his person and his pedagogy was part of the impression he left on students. It was genuine, in the most real use of that word I have ever known.

I had the good fortune of being able to speak with him every day about these sorts of things, and I cherish it, as many former students emphatically told me I should. The range of interests of these former students speaks to the inclusiveness of his care for them. Sure, there are those who study James, Dewey, Royce, and Peirce, but there are also those in literature, sociology, architecture, medicine, education, and those outside academia—all of them encouraged by Professor McDermott to sate the fire of their interests by committing passionately to them. McDermott did not push unless one wanted to be pushed, because he held firmly to the model espoused by Dewey that students' interests cannot be created, but once initiated it is a waste to not let them blossom—and then he will push, and poke, and encourage, and inspire.

McDermott taught right up until the end, despite being in tremendous pain and knowing he probably didn't have much time left. His last course was a graduate seminar on the philosophy of John Dewey. He died partway into the semester. I was one of the many to pitch in and teach some of the remaining classes. It was intense, both as the loss remained so close and because stepping into his classroom and filling his brown boots was impossible. I have since found that expressing my gratitude and debt to him in writing has also been nearly impossible. Consequently, I am doubly grateful to the contributors of this issue for their words. A brief introduction to the essays in this issue follows.

Professor McDermott himself wrote the first and last entries in this issue. The first is a poem entitled "Their Time is Up—And Mine?" It is, as far as I know, the last poem he wrote. At least, it is the last poem he showed me. I look forward to the day when a collection of his poetry is made available, although that is a task for another day. I read this poem at his graveside funeral, which also included bagpipes, drums, and an electric guitar. The poem shows both the awareness McDermott had of his situation during the last year of his life, and his gratitude and appreciation for those whom he missed. The line in the poem that includes the initials R.W.S. refers to Ralph W. Sleeper.

Richard Hart's "The Owl of Minerva Landed Amongst Us" recounts his early encounters with Professor McDermott in the early 1970s and discusses some consistent threads throughout his academic work, as well as what Hart calls "...a variety of practical, in-your-face pedagogical strategies and techniques I long ago stole from him..." (5)

David Sprintzen's "McDermott in Memoriam" opens with the aesthetics course McDermott taught in the 1960s and '70s, which was "a Queens College cultural event of the first order." (22) Sprintzen details his more than half a century association with McDermott and offers stories of how he "would make regular pilgrimages back to visit John's classes, to be personally re-energized, intellectually stimulated, theoretically re-focused, and practically re-engaged in the ongoing tasks of cultural and political reconstruction." (24)

Linda Simon, who was also a McDermott student at Queens College in the 1960s, writes of her experience of taking Western Civilization with a young Professor McDermott who had just completed his doctoral dissertation. In "A Student's Memory of John McDermott," she notes that for him:

it was clear that pedagogy was more than theoretical: It was urgent. And teaching was not merely a matter of exposing students to great men and their great ideas but leading these credulous young people to doubt—those ideas, and themselves—opening them, as he once put it, "to novelty, surprise, and the dismaying message" that their beliefs "may have been self-foreclosing." (29)

Simon favorably compares McDermott to the accounts of William James's own pedagogical method and reflects on the overlapping themes in McDermott's published work and his message to those who took his courses.

John Kainer's essay "The McDermott Walk" elaborates on "the life-changing assignment he gave me, and the remarkable difference he has made and continues to make in my life and the lives of my students." (34) Kainer is a recently graduated sociology doctoral student from Texas A&M. He was first drawn to sign up for one of

McDermott's courses in 2015 out of curiosity about the stories and his fabled status on campus, and "over the course of the semester, proceeded to be more confused, confounded, understood, and cared about than at any prior point in my education." (34) Kainer became one of McDermott's students from then on, and even spent some time helping to organize, sort, and trying to make everything fit at Professor McDermott's home library, which included a personal collection of over 35,000 books.

"Robert Pollock's Influence on John McDermott," by James Campbell, compares the work of these two figures in American philosophy and shows how Pollock's published work and time as McDermott's doctoral advisor impacted McDermott's thought. It also contends that there is a fundamental difference between the two thinkers, specifically "on the religious meaning of the American experience." (56) Despite this difference, McDermott's praise for Pollock remained consistent throughout his life, and he often went out of his way to credit Pollock. The essay also includes a timeline for Pollock's life and work and was the only essay in this issue that McDermott read before his death. This is why the essay concludes with the sentence: "Further work, perhaps autobiographical work on McDermott's part, might enable us to understand why he did not fully adopt the positions of Pollock." (56)

The last essay is a reprint of McDermott's final published essay on William James. "A Jamesean Personscape: The Fringe as Messaging to the 'Sick Soul'" was delivered as the William James Lecture on Religious Experience at Harvard Divinity School in 2010 and was originally published in the *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*. In archetypal McDermott fashion, he included his phone number with the published version of the lecture, along with an invitation to call him if any of those who read it wanted to have a conversation. It is a masterpiece that encapsulates the best of McDermott's unique writing style. He interweaves his vast knowledge of both the writings and person of William James with figures such as Tolstoy, Goethe, Carl Jung, Gerald Manley Hopkins, Heraclitus, Johannes Scotus Eriugena, and Walt Whitman, among others. For McDermott, no poet, novelist, critic, academic discipline, science,

or religious screed, from any time in history, was ever ruled out as a source of wisdom. Drawing from this, he makes a sustained analysis of James's concept of the "sick soul" from the *Varieties*. He offers his own personal story as a lens to untangle and understand the concept; namely, his struggle with alcoholism and the subsequent decades of sobriety and active involvement in the Alcoholics Anonymous community.

In closing, I include the last lines of his obituary, which he, of course, wrote himself. In the months leading up to his death, when it became clear to him that his body was failing, the obituary went through numerous drafts and revisions. He taugth to the end, but he also maintained his tried-and-tested method of yellow legal pad pages packed with marginalia, asides, and handwriting that only a handful of folks have confidence in deciphering. He approached the task of writing about his own death with the same determination to do good work, the same existential awareness and temperament, and with the same pragmatic and pluralistic ideals that he approached every task and every day. He writes at the end:

"I send blessings to all who have crossed my path and wishes for a peaceful death. Try to remember that the nectar is in the journey! Farewell."

THEIR TIME IS UP—AND MINE?

John J. McDermott
Texas A&M University

Of late
my colleagues
and
Friends
are now
the late
whomever
Once known
Once affected
Loved
Now Missed

Caught in the
Rapid
Rapids
of Death
Has anyone Heard
From
Betty, David M., David N.
Charles, Daphne, Sidney
Steve, Bob S., Darnell, Mack
And for me
Most
Most
of all the
Missed
R.W.S.
the

Irreplaceable
One
Yet, Now
is it not clear
as
Sadly Clear
Can
Be
That later
For me
will Be
the late me
It
Seems So
So
It Seems
(Alas)

THE OWL OF MINERVA LANDED AMONGST US:
A REFLECTION ON THE LIFE AND WORK OF
JOHN J. McDERMOTT

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*When I am dead, I hope it may be said:
"His sins were scarlet, but his books were read."*

–Hilaire Belloc

I

McDermott is now dead. For sure, his “books” were read, and will continue to be read. For me his “books” include not only his thoroughly original, soaring and inspiring essays, published separately and collected in volumes. They also include his many edited volumes of writings and correspondence by the greatest philosophers in the American tradition. But his enduring “books” must as well include all those books he instructed us to read and all that he bequeathed to us as a teacher. The meaning, impact and legacy of McDermott, the teacher, has passed from generation to generation, will continue to pass from one to the other, and may well outlast what he put down on paper.

What to make of the line, “His sins were scarlet,” in the Belloc quote above? Anyone who came to know McDermott beyond the

classroom understood that he was not perfect; hence, a typical human in moral terms. As with all of us, he had a past, his marked by the occasional pockmark. Like other persons of brilliance, his “sins” could be as shiny and public as was his inimitable persona and endless collection of singular achievements. He was, at the least and most, a balancing act, a lovely and forever intriguing balancing act. With McDermott in mind I conjure up D. H. Lawrence’s observation about Hamlet: “for the soliloquies of Hamlet are as deep as the soul of man can go ... and as sincere as the Holy Spirit in their essence.”¹ Lawrence was ambivalent about Hamlet, puzzling over how “a creeping, unclean thing” such as the flesh could, also, be “as sincere as the Holy Spirit.”² But this seemed to capture Hamlet’s view of humankind, and I think a large part of McDermott’s as well. Throughout his long life, his joyous partaking of the manifold experience of this world, the physical world, was forever matched, indeed exceeded every step of the way, by an infinitely generous and overwhelming spirit that aspired to the heavens and only death could harness.

Considering my rather pretentious title, we know Minerva was the Roman goddess of wisdom, usually associated with the wise owl. Hegel’s claim that the owl of Minerva does not fly until the evening shadows fall was a way of saying that wisdom and understanding in the course of human history comes only at a late stage, as we look back and appreciate what came before. Our collective history, the history of ideas and theories and art, is thus crucial to present understanding, which conversely can, also, be taken to imply that we cripple comprehension as we neglect or ignore the past. Here we must be quick to acknowledge the obvious: that McDermott did more than anyone ever during his professional life to resurrect and forcefully promote sorely neglected works of the greats in American culture and philosophy, rescuing them from the scrapheap of intellectual fashion and indifference while assuring their prominence in the life blood of philosophy and American intellectual culture. This monumental and singular achievement, along with his teaching, always his teaching, is what I have in mind by the image of the wise owl that, to our good fortune, landed

amongst us. And we should never forget that McDermott lived by a creed that is effectively conveyed in a line from John Dewey, “Wisdom is knowledge operating in the direction of powers to the better living of life.”³ But enough of the laudatory and perhaps highbrow, for I can hear McDermott barking in my ear, “Enough already, Hart, get on to the concrete, the specific and practical,” or what we might otherwise call the “experience” of the man in his wholeness.

To such end, what follows is not intended as a scholarly appreciation, but rather a very personal remembrance and expression of gratitude for a life-altering debt I could never, ever repay. It consists of four parts: my early encounters with McDermott; some general and pervasive themes from his work that have most impacted my development as a philosopher and teacher; a variety of practical, in-your-face pedagogical strategies and techniques I long ago stole from him; and, lastly, an attempt, foredoomed to incompleteness, to bring it all together in a brief summary. Essentially, my task is to try my best to detail what McDermott has meant to me and why.

II

My first actual encounter with McDermott, the real guy, was in September 1973, during my first year of doctoral study in philosophy at Stony Brook University. He was a visiting professor and was tapped to offer a proseminar in the teaching of philosophy. He had won the 1970 Harbison National Award for Gifted Teaching, and was quite legendary as a teacher at his home base, Queens College (CUNY). I had done some graduate student teaching at Ohio University before arriving at Stony Brook, and much enjoyed the experience. I signed up for McDermott’s course in hopes of honing the craft of teaching and, like the other enrollees, expecting it to be an easy A when compared with the other doctoral seminars. In my case, McDermott’s reputation preceded our initial meeting. At Ohio University I met and in 1972 married a young woman from Queens. A couple of her childhood friends, who remained home and

studied at Queens College, paid us occasional visits in Athens, Ohio. Since I was a philosophy student, they were keen to tell me about this incredible philosophy teacher of theirs at Queens whose legendary Aesthetics course was standing room only, and required signing up years in advance to gain a spot. They spoke about the marvel and transformative power of his teaching. Needless to say, I was eager to meet and witness McDermott in action.

The first class night he was not there. The graduate director appeared to tell us that McDermott was stuck at an airport somewhere in central Europe (perhaps Poland) and he did not know for sure when he would be back in the U.S. As I recall, he did appear the following week. Suddenly, through the door raced this small, bearded guy dressed in a dark suit and tie covered with chalk dust. He seemed to be in a sprint in a twenty-foot-wide space. A pipe hung from his mouth and the whole room suddenly smelled of tobacco smoke. He seemed to me a tightly wound bundle of nervous energy that could possibly explode at any moment. Though my experience in New York was at that point limited, I knew this guy had to be a classic New Yorker. As I best recall, he had just finished teaching a class at Queens, and had jumped into his car for the harried trip east in rush hour traffic out to Stony Brook. He lugged a large leather bag filled to overflowing with myriad papers and books, tobacco and alternative pipes, and perhaps even left-over lunch. Once he got sorted out, which involved emptying the bag of a stack of frayed books and file folders, he proceeded to lay out for us what this seminar was going to be all about. Suddenly, things got serious. Each of us was going to have to design syllabi for undergraduate courses at the beginning, intermediate and advanced levels, and have them critiqued by him and our classmates. Each of us would then have to stand before the group and deliver simulated lectures at each of the different levels, also to be critiqued in the same manner. Each would be expected to design an undergraduate major and minor program in philosophy. This had to, of course, also be defended before the group, and subjected to the same stinging critiques. Each of us had to articulate to the group our philosophy of education. McDermott especially wanted to know what our goals

and objectives were with each course or lecture, at each level. What were we trying to accomplish as philosophy teachers? There was a lot more, but I suspect the reader gets the idea. Far from an easy A—after all, it was just to be a soft course on teaching—it turned out to be arguably the most difficult, most demanding seminar I took at Stony Brook. But I did learn something lasting about how to conceive of philosophy and just what was involved in successfully teaching it. Another thing abundantly clear to me at semester's end was that once you become a student of McDermott you will be his student for life. That's just the way he wanted it. You had no choice in the matter.

Flash ahead about three-to-four years, and I had finished drafting a proposal for my dissertation research. It was an interdisciplinary project, marrying philosophy and literature, with the aim of doing a metaphysical investigation into the philosophical foundations of literary art. McDermott had agreed to serve on the committee, and soon the committee and doctoral program director gathered for my oral presentation of the proposal. The questioning was intense, but after an hour or two the project met with the approval of the committee and I was given the green light to proceed. In the hall, as the group broke up, I recall McDermott calling me over for a word. It went something like this, and I paraphrase: "Look here, Hart, this is a lovely proposal. I love interdisciplinary work and I love literature, but this is just too damned ambitious, too big. You'll never get this thing done. You'll be writing for years." I assured him I could handle it, and that this was a real passion for me. He finally said okay and wished me luck, but I knew he still had some real concern about my efficient path to the PhD. Indeed, it ended up taking eleven years in total before I would be awarded the doctorate. As fate would have it, in 1977 McDermott headed off to Texas (I still cannot fathom him in Texas), and in the pre-internet, pre-email days it seemed difficult for us to correspond regularly about drafts of the dissertation. He was, also, going to be extremely busy as Professor and Head of the Philosophy Department at Texas A&M University, and so we agreed he would withdraw from my committee. But it was both an ending and a beginning. From there

on he maintained a keen interest in my progress, offered counsel and helped arrange interviews for me at APA conventions. Whenever I saw him at meetings and conferences, he was encouraging and always wanted to know everything going on with my teaching and family and research. I recall one occasion when he was instrumental in getting me a serious interview with a well-regarded private college in Texas. He said he knew key people in the department and that it would be perfect for a guy like me who cared so much about teaching and interdisciplinary work. I had a good interview and was assured that I was one of the finalists, though I was not particularly desperate in that I then held an administrative job at a college on Long Island. A few days later I received a call from McDermott with a message something like (again I paraphrase), "So, listen Hart, the Dean won't budge. He says there's no way that an administrator in New York is going to accept the faculty salary we can pay. He'll never come, so let's not waste our time." McDermott could not talk him down, and so that was that.

Those days of dissertation writing and searching for faculty positions was a very long time ago. In the nearly forty years since, I've enjoyed numerous conversations and interactions with McDermott. From the beginning, I've loved his energy and feistiness and attitude. I've always adored the New Yorker in him, an ever-present affect that distinguished him from so many academics I've known. With McDermott, what you see is what you get. Imagine: a New York City streetwise guy from the neighborhood in suit and tie, cowboy hat and tall leather boots. Who would have thought? One of the great honors of my own career was co-organizing, with my friend, James Campbell, a conference at Southern Illinois University honoring McDermott's 70th birthday and 50 years of teaching. The papers on his work, stemming from the conference, later became a book that critically appraised the many dimensions of McDermott's philosophy and teaching. But aside from the professional McDermott, the mover and shaker, the incredibly loquacious guy with the original turns of phrase, often in Latin, I was blessed to know him as a deeply caring human being. One prime example comes to mind. Many years ago, he and I were

on a conference program at Oxford University. He attended my paper on John Steinbeck's personalism and afterward sat me down and told me privately and definitively what changes I needed to make in the paper. Thanks, John. Then later in the night, in his dorm room, I gulped down a couple of English beers and shared with him my considerable worry over our younger daughter's serious chronic illness. He wanted to know everything, every detail, and pledged to help in any way he could. Once back in the States, I received from him a flurry of phone calls and mailings with the names of doctors, possible medications and the best research facilities to tackle the problem. He put a lot of focus and time into my family's medical problems, and I will never forget his compassion and consoling words. That was vintage McDermott the man.

III

There are a few general and central themes from McDermott's life and work, his precious essays and professional lectures, but mostly from his teaching, that have had the greatest influence on me as a philosopher and teacher. They all revolve around how he conceived the nature of philosophy and philosophical activity, what it means to really and truly teach philosophy, and to have a full, well-rounded career of service in a college or university. I cannot here go into any of them in great detail. Instead I will just serially touch on them, with a brief explanation for each regarding the effect it had on me.

For McDermott philosophy is not, at its core, about abstract concepts and dry theories. It is not about sweeping generalizations or truth claims subjected to the surgery of logic. Philosophy is about the stories, about the narrative experience of life lived to its fullest. This focus is encapsulated so simply and elegantly in his oft-expressed phrase, "the nectar is in the journey." Philosophy for him is not about a final conclusion or deliverance into some supernatural realm of insight. It is about the experience of thoughtful living—the joys and pains, the successes and the struggles, the exuberance and the sorrows, of individuals alone and in community with others. As Dewey reminded us, philosophy seeks to develop powers for the

better living of life with others. Furthermore, the way that McDermott's aesthetics places experience at its core, enhanced by the work of Dewey, has exerted the strongest influence in shaping my own ideas about art and literature. For McDermott, locality and context are of prime importance, but must be seen as going hand in glove with the global, the bigger picture. It's no coincidence that the word "experience" appears in so many of McDermott's books and essays, as well as pieces written about him. My own career-long teaching and writing about philosophy and literature would likely never have come together absent the steady presence of McDermott whispering in my ear that it's "all about the experience."

Closely related, he taught, in his person, his writing, and his teaching, that one can be a New York City street-wise philosopher and yet enjoy more universal impact. For me, McDermott will always be a wise-cracking city intellectual, a guy with smarts hewn from authentic interaction with lots of different people from every walk of life and every neighborhood. He had a story for every occasion, and most of them seemed to come from his childhood and early adult years in New York. Yet his work in philosophy reached out to both local and more universal audiences and brought him acclaim from far and yon, in areas beyond American philosophy such as education, health and social welfare, the social sciences, and political thought. He travelled the world and addressed diverse audiences wherever he went. He was the very embodiment of multiculturalism well before we had the label. Mysterious though it may have been, there was something in his experience, his fiber, his connection with others that gave him a broad appeal. Can it be any coincidence that not long ago he was recognized as one of the fifty most influential philosophers in the world, an honor I've been told that was celebrated, of all places, at a Texas A&M football game. He may be the only philosopher in world history to have been lauded at such a sporting event, yet another testament to his attractiveness beyond the ivy-covered halls of academe.

Another lesson I learned from McDermott would help occasionally to settle my anxiety over the long shot of a career in philosophy. It seemed to me that virtually every graduate student in

philosophy yearned to be the next Kant or Wittgenstein. And they were convinced that the only way of getting there was through publication, the prime measure of philosophical quality. Being a small-town country boy, with no college in the family DNA, I was never confident that I could keep pace with my more urbane and well-read fellow students. Hegel was not within my sights as I reflected honestly on my nature and capacity. But as I gradually came to digest McDermott into my philosophical bloodstream, I realized that, for him, to be a respected and successful philosopher one need not necessarily be a prolific publisher and celebrated scholar. Such was nice if you could get it (a tiny percentage ever do), but it is not the sole requirement for legitimacy or measure of quality. The bona fide condition for McDermott was that to be a philosopher one must, first and foremost, like Socrates, be a teacher of philosophy. Moreover, you had better be a damned good one, someone deadly serious about the craft and forever wrestling with how to get even better. For him, this required unbridled commitment, an appetite for really hard work, and an unqualified passion for students and their growth and well-being. In other words, if you wanted to be in the philosophy racket with McDermott you had to have a genuine love for others—all others, since everyone was his student—whomever they may be, wherever they came from. Now that I am retired from a long, hopefully legitimate career in philosophy, I can look back and see how his lessons shaped my academic values, my attitudes, as well as my activities.

As we know, there are McDermott students everywhere, in every sort of educational setting, service organization, or philanthropic enterprise. Some are well known, some not so. Some are big fish in little ponds, some little fish in big ponds, and a few big fish in big ponds. But regardless of style or endeavor, they are all McDermott students. My own journey, in a nutshell, is a relatively modest one. The meanderings of my “career” took me through academic administration, large public universities, a business school, community colleges, and eventually to a thirty-year run at a small, private, liberal arts oriented, multicultural, and multiracial college in New Jersey. Throughout it all I was always, at

base, a teacher of philosophy. I have been an active and loyal participant in the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy since the mid-1970s. I am one of a small group of students of the late Justus Buchler who believes fervently in the original nature and importance of his philosophical method and system. Like the others, I have written and spoken on his work whenever possible. Early in my career, I enjoyed some success as an adult education administrator. Over the past twenty-five or so years I have mustered a small measure of recognition as one of a handful of philosophers to do serious work on the American writer, John Steinbeck. But if I am to be honest with myself, any claim I might make to a successful career in philosophy hangs almost entirely on my work as a philosophy teacher. There was to be no latter-day Kant for me, and I suppose somewhere along the line I made my peace with the reality of my own talents and shortcomings. However, throughout the many years, my ever-present and greatest source of pride grew out of my teaching. It's what has always brought me the highest level of satisfaction and pleasure. My point here is not to toot a self-referencing horn but to represent with gusto and celebration what McDermott taught me through word and deed: there is honor, dignity, and lasting importance in being an effective teacher of philosophy. Without engaged and engaging teaching, the discipline of philosophy essentially withers on the vine. And when any teacher thinks about the span of her classroom work over a career, it's surely the teaching that impacted the lives of thousands of people over generations. Our conference lectures, articles, and books, unless we are the extremely rare and lucky person, reach at best a small group of professionals, sometimes only the handful of scholars around the world who can make any sense out of what we say. Perhaps the way to see all this, from a McDermott angle, is to highlight just how convincingly he taught us that philosophy is at base a way of life, a practice, again with Socrates, originally rooted in and always returning to teaching. To be a philosopher is to be a forever inquiring, forever experiencing person whose greatest joy and struggle is to share the journey through pedagogy. But I can once again hear McDermott admonishing me to get down from the

pedestal and dig into the weeds, because that's where the action really is.

IV

To that end, I will dwell for a bit on some very practical and concrete tricks in teaching that, as I said earlier, I “appropriated” from McDermott a long, long time ago and have all these years since been figuring out how to make my own, in other words, how to make them work in my unique context. For thirty years I taught mostly first-generation minority students from the urban school systems of New Jersey and the greater New York metropolitan area. But over the course of forty plus years I have taught at community colleges, public and private schools, a business school, in adult education programs, and presently in a non-credit program for senior, mostly retired participants at Stony Brook University. I am reasonably well convinced that the McDermott style of teaching worked most of the time in such very diverse settings. To me, it always seemed McDermott had a near infinite bag of well-conceived, wrought-from-experience, pedagogical techniques and strategies that obviously worked for him most of the time and that, while hardly consonant with my own nature and personality, I could perhaps emulate to good effect. So, here are a few of them in brief.

I've always regarded McDermott as what I will call an “in your face” teacher. This is no doubt part of a New York City style gleaned from a lot of experience in a rough and tumble, hustle and breakneck urban environment. He was always about getting down and dirty, about loads of examples, about making connections, about engaging his students. No matter where they were in their education—freshman to doctoral students—he firmly believed that you must first connect with students in an authentic human way before you can ever teach them anything. Engagement is the first order of business and begins the very first minute of any course. For him it was about establishing a human bond that naturally evolved from trust and from the student, every student, somehow knowing that McDermott really cared about them. He put it plainly in a 2003

interview for *Pathways to Discovery*, the annual magazine of the College of Liberal Arts at Texas A&M, when he contended that all students are educable: “You have to have experiential ties (to your students) ... Once these commonalities are established, a mutual respect exists.”⁴ So, what are some of the features of being a respectful “in your face” teacher?

McDermott’s classroom was a vital and dynamic place. Crucial to establishing and maintaining that sort of ambience were such things as movement, modulation of the voice, and eye contact. He always roamed his classroom—marching, sometimes skipping or jumping in the aisle ways—always insisting in an unstated manner that the students follow his every movement. He would rush to the board and frantically write something that no one could read as his way of emphasizing the importance of a point or idea or argument. He would get so enthralled in the moment that he did not realize that chalk dust was all over his suit. But the key point is that it was virtually impossible to go to sleep in his class. The flow of ideas and the movement of his body were synchronous, dramatic, and forever captivating. His board work always stood out, for it was almost a gymnastic exercise, a modern dance of writing and erasing and running out of space, breaking the chalk in a flurry of activity, and reaching for that one last bit of space on the board to render his insight for the day. I learned from him to write a bunch of stuff on the board, especially to outline on the board what was going to happen in that class period and to use the board as a focal mode of emphasis. Quotations ran rampant on a McDermott blackboard. From what may have seemed a chaos of energy, McDermott was actually well-organized and disciplined. He knew exactly what he wanted to accomplish in every period. He began every class meeting by briefly summarizing the last, and ended by anticipating how the next period would build on the one just concluded. Though I rarely got as much chalk dust on my jacket, I learned the fine art of animation and board work, and always knew it was McDermott facilitating my own version of a dynamic classroom.

A big part of the “movement” in the McDermott classroom was “calling out students” and what I term “the hallway pursuit.” Part of

being “in your face” yet respectful was the practice of calling on (or out) students by name. This practice rested on the firm foundation of McDermott’s getting to know his students, to the maximum extent possible. He truly wanted to know each one of them, their backgrounds and interests, what made them tick. His curiosity about other humans was boundless. If you signed up for his course, he assumed that you were there for a reason, and that you were prepared to enter into a relationship with him and the course material. In his course you were going to work, but you knew he would likely outwork you. When you sat in his classroom, you had to be prepared for him to call on you at any moment. “What do you think of this idea? Does this make any sense to you? Would you share this idea or argument with a friend?” One had to be forever alert in McDermott’s classroom. He did not call on students to embarrass them if they were unprepared (well, maybe occasionally he did), but because he wanted to know what they thought. Students were never simply empty repositories to be filled up with knowledge by the teacher. They were living, experiencing young people who had ideas and concerns and things to share if only the artful, experienced teacher could draw it out of them. For McDermott, “calling on students” was just another way of not holding back, not being shy or intimidated. Every student had a story to tell and loads of examples from their life experience. The stories had to be taken seriously and given appropriate respect, no matter how inchoate the telling might seem. A key aspect of this approach was never to speak down to students, but always to challenge and elevate them. I never knew of McDermott watering down anything in philosophy when he spoke to students. He had no interest in making it easy. His challenge was always how to come up with explanations or formulations that the students could relate to, and thus to engage them. Philosophy need not be dry abstractions and technicalities, which assuredly would turn away all but philosophy majors. Philosophy was integral to life as lived. As to “the hallway pursuit,” as I phrase it, McDermott was known to chase a student down the hallway after class or during a break if he felt he needed to talk with them about something. I took to the practice and often confronted

students out of class if I thought there was something wrong in their lives or that they could do better on a test or paper. Like McDermott, I would present my questions or comments to them straightaway and try to build on their responses. This was yet another way of getting to know the students better, and putting oneself in position to reach the students and facilitate their learning. McDermott's students always knew that he cared about them, and that he was not going to go easy on them. But they also knew that if they stuck with him they were going to learn more about philosophy and life than they could ever have thought possible.

Earlier I cited two additional techniques: modulation of the voice and eye contact. For McDermott a monotonic voice from the teacher was not only boring and sleep-inducing, it was akin to malpractice. He would in the course of any class hour scream and whisper, slow it down to a crawl and speed up his words to a state of virtual incomprehension, toss in every manner of street expression and wisecrack and joke, and the whole brew, the gestalt, was typically exhilarating and at times exhausting. One often left McDermott's class feeling completely worked over intellectually and emotionally, yet invigorated and eager for the next go around. And a final key strategy, terribly important, was making eye contact. McDermott would at times approach a student at their seat and directly pose a question, with not much physical space between them. As he roamed the aisles he would look into each student's eyes and often call on them by name. It's one of the lessons I took to heart. During class presentations I always looked into each student's face as they spoke or I posed a question to them. When someone looks directly into your eyes, speaks directly to you rather than hiding behind a veil of expertise, you know that person is serious about you and the work you are doing together. So, eye contact, physical movement and voice modulation—a trifecta I consider essential to my self-understanding as a teacher and instrumental to any success I hopefully enjoyed in the classroom. In simple terms, in all this McDermott was my ever-present mentor and guide. Countless times, over more than forty years of teaching, I would catch myself in class, in the thick of the moment, suddenly

thinking about how McDermott would handle this very instant of experience.

For McDermott, philosophy was like a great drama played out in books, conference speeches, conversations in the hallways, and most powerfully in classroom discussions. Teaching was, thus, largely, though not exclusively, a performance art, forever a creative activity infused by critical reason and boundless imagination. Effective teaching involves preparation and discipline, but much of it must be spontaneous, impromptu as the always unpredictable flow of question and answer and discussion evolves in the classroom. For him, the philosophy teacher must always be good “on her feet,” must fully exist in the moment, shift gears on a dime, spontaneously conjure examples from art and literature and everyday life, and always be open to the vexing questions that may emerge from left field. This is the key to effective communication that McDermott modelled and taught, and that so few of us fully understand or, with grace and confidence, bring into practice. While it may no doubt seem odd, let me hazard a grand and general impression I got from him that tends to tie all the above together. I knew something of McDermott’s religious upbringing and formal education, but we all knew of his insistent rejection of the supernatural and the salvific impulse. Strangely enough, I always thought that for him the classroom was his sanctuary. I often said to my own students over the years that our work together in our classroom was nothing short of sacred and, therefore, inviolable. If there be such a thing as a secular religious or spiritual experience, I would like to believe that for McDermott, for me, and for perhaps numerous of his students, our work in the classroom is one of the prime places where we found it. This is the sort of phenomenon that cannot be explained or theorized; it can only be experienced.

V

McDermott used the word “pedagogy” all the time. For a long while I did not understand why. To me it seemed that pedagogy simply described specific strategies that one employed in the formal

classroom. But after all these years with McDermott, I now think I understand better. For him, the whole of his life—his writing, teaching, cajoling, loving, advising—all of it was simply varieties of pedagogy, variations on what for him was the inexhaustible theme of teaching. Experiments in pedagogy were his great project, his reason for getting up in the morning and going to work. He found endless joy in being a faithful teacher, in using philosophy as a way of forging connections with others and changing lives. Now that I am older and retired from full-time teaching, I think I have an even keener appreciation for all that McDermott was and is. His impact on every dimension of my life and those of countless others—impacts both personal and professional—are quite simply immeasurable, something I suspect he may never have fully realized. For him, he was just doing his job.

In the end, there are, of course, a number of ways of taking the measure of McDermott's life and work. His writing, editing, and speaking engagements collectively represent an unparalleled achievement. On this, we are all in his debt. His founding effort in the creation of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy is a legacy that will endure forever. His friendship and mentoring helped shape the lives and careers of so many of us. As a scholar, teacher, and person, the world would have been seriously diminished had he never resided amongst us. But it's the bonds he forged with his students through teaching that will stand the test of time, alongside his many volumes of works by William James, John Dewey, and Josiah Royce, among others. Those bonds transcend any particular classroom, course, or university. At the beginning of this essay I mentioned a couple of guys from Queens College I met back in the 1970s who had been McDermott's students. They are Mike Frenkel and Howie Kaplan. Kaplan went on to a PhD in psychology and a career in the helping professions. Frenkel taught English in New York City public high schools for some forty years. In 2013, Frenkel attended a lecture McDermott gave at Queens and afterward posted the following message to his former students:

Just attended a lecture given by a now 80 year old philosophy professor whose Aesthetics course I took over 40 years ago, and realized as he spoke today that so much of what was important to me as a teacher (creativity, learning as process, the uniqueness/importance of each student) originated in his classroom. So, if I was your teacher, so was John McDermott. Celebrate a teacher.

On the wall of my study is a small poster from the March 2009 celebration at Texas A&M of the life and work of John J. McDermott. McDermott's head is bowed and his eyes concealed by the broad brim of his hat. But I know he is looking straight at me—every day, every moment—beseeching me to never forget the title of his celebration, “The nectar is in the journey.” This is the McDermott line I will take with me to my own grave. He lived the journey and tasted the nectar in all its exquisiteness and variety. For those of us who crossed his path in this life, we are the lucky ones who got to accompany him on the journey. In closing, I offer some favorite lines of verse that I believe capture at least some of who McDermott was and what he meant to us. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote,

Bright is the ring of words
 When the right man rings them
Fair the fall of songs
 When the singer sings them
Still they are caroled and said
 On wings they are carried
After the singer is dead
 And the maker buried.⁵

And then the closing lines of Tennyson's “Ulysses,” lines recited by Henry Fonda at the 1968 funeral of another American original, John Steinbeck, at St. James Episcopal Church in Manhattan:

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now the strength which in old days

Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.⁶

McDermott is still speaking to me. After my retirement, I left a message on his machine describing how I was flailing around, a bit lost, but taking it easy on myself after years of commuting to campus through New York City traffic. His spirited, return message was something like, “Okay, Hart, you’ve had your much-deserved break from the grind, but now you need to get off your ass and produce that Steinbeck book we’ve been waiting for.” The book may never happen, but his words, and the spirit behind them, will resonate in my ear until my final breath.

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NOTES

- ¹ As cited in Bloom, *Hamlet*, 9.
- ² Bloom, *Hamlet*, 9.
- ³ Dewey, *How We Think*, 52.
- ⁴ McDermott, "No End in Sight," 8.
- ⁵ Stevenson, "Bright," 1038.
- ⁶ Tennyson, "Ulysses," 118.

MCDERMOTT IN MEMORIAM

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If you were a serious student at Queens College in the 1960s or '70s, you probably took Philosophy 10 at some time in your academic career, regardless of your major. You almost certainly had heard of that course and the pressure of students seeking to squeeze into the classroom, even if they were unable to register for it. This was John McDermott's class on Aesthetics. It was a Queens College cultural event of the first order. Not only would all of the chairs have been occupied, but students could have been found seated on the floor in all the aisles and even a few sitting on the windowsills or standing by the door. As the class unfolded, the blackboard would increasingly take on the appearance of a Jackson Pollock painting: spirals among spirals, with lines darting in and out, and squiggles like fleeing electrons in a Feynman diagram, spurting out from who knows where, and for what reason. It was never clear what the relation was between the marks on the blackboard and the content of the presentation. But discussions of modern art were intermingled with comments drawn from Indian and Chinese philosophy, from numerous figures in the history of Western philosophy, or from observations from contemporary psychology, sociology, or sub-atomic physics. Reflections on Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle might flow into a discussion of Andy Warhol or Anton Webern and Igor Stravinsky. And never far

from the surface were moving, dramatic personal stories that brought abstract truths down to intimate affairs fraught with life-changing significance.

To experience Philosophy 10 was, in many ways, to be introduced to a self-contained college education that spanned the disciplines. And it was, as always with McDermott, an existential drama to be experienced and lived through as much as an intellectual excursion by which to be enlightened. Few left that class unchanged in their intellectual and personal self-understanding. I know that was true for me. My philosophical and personal life trajectory was fundamentally transformed by my encounter with John McDermott.

Many years later, when I organized a personalized celebration of McDermott's life and thought at CW Post College—in 2002, to be exact, celebrating his seventieth birthday and his fifty years of teaching—one of the most memorable moments was when John's oldest daughter, Marise, provided a dramatic reenactment of her father teaching that Queens College aesthetics class. Although there are not to my knowledge any videos of John teaching that class, fortunately, Marise's dramatization was captured on video and is still available to be viewed. I have a copy of that presentation, as part of the video of the entire conference, and do watch it from time to time, to keep me in touch with the excitement and philosophical vision that was therein presented.

While the experience of that class encapsulated the personal excitement, cultural dynamism, and stimulating philosophical vision that John McDermott both personally embodied and interpersonally and intellectually communicated, it offers but a snapshot both of the range of his intellectual vision and of his life-altering influence on the lives of innumerable students.

Speaking only for myself, I can honestly say that his influence was personal, intellectual, and transformative. To put it somewhat schematically, I was, over time, transformed from an emotional and intellectual Thomist, attracted to a static, quasi-absolutist conception of values and beliefs, to a processive pragmatist, focused on the theoretical and practical transformation of the concrete,

temporally unfolding personal worlds of individuals, societies, and cultures.

For years after my graduation from Queens College in 1961, through graduate school, and well into my professional teaching career, I would make regular pilgrimages back to visit John's classes, to be personally re-energized, intellectually stimulated, theoretically re-focused, and practically re-engaged in the ongoing tasks of cultural and political reconstruction. It is from these roots that emerged not only my philosophical work on Albert Camus and John Dewey, but my formulation of what I call 'Political Metaphysics' and its practical application both in creating several dialogic communities and, more consequentially, in the building of community-based progressive organizations, the most successful of which is the Long Island Progressive Coalition, founded in 1979 and continuing to grow even to the present day.

John understood, and never lost sight of the fact, that the meaning of each person's life was a unique, temporally unfolding, finite affair. Each person's journey, though pervasively social, was yet uniquely personal. And that, in the most profound way, Martin Buber had expressed life's most fundamental existential truth, that our fulfillment is to be found in the intimate relations of I and Thou. John's shared personal stories often dramatized such uniquely meaningful encounters, as did his openness and concern for his students. He never forgot that each of us was on our own personal journey, and while there was no salvific fulfillment awaiting us at the end, "the nectar was in the journey."

But none of our journeys are pure nectar, and certainly McDermott's was not. His lifelong battle with alcohol, for example, exacerbated by his emotionally shattering narrow defeat for the presidency of the APA, almost brought his life to an early and tragic end. Only the dedicated intervention of committed friends, particularly Gene Fontinelle, forced his hospitalization. And only then did his dedicated lifetime involvement with AA, and the unfailing support of his wife Patricia, sustained him from then on. As he mentioned to me, he could only take long trips if accompanied by Patricia. And wherever he went, he would seek out and attend

meetings of the local AA chapter. I will never forget, while visiting John at Texas A&M, joining him on one of his regular meetings of the local chapter. It was clear that these were serious engagements at which his friends and co-addicts were providing mutual support as they struggled on a common journey.

I am sure that such personal struggles enriched John's appreciation for, and sensitivity to, the richness and complexity of each person's journey through life. And it vitalized his growing involvement with the medical profession, focusing on the existential concerns that far too often were left unattended by the scientific professionalization and bureaucratic institutionalization of medical treatment. He often spoke of the insight and compassion brought to the medical profession by "wounded healers." But such an approach often met incomprehension, if not downright resistance, from medical professionals. I can attest to that from my experience of the reception he received upon the occasion of giving the lecture that celebrated the opening of the medical school at Hofstra University.

This effort to humanize the medical profession was but an example of the way that John sought to break down institutional barriers that impeded the human being's capacity to develop to the fullness of life's potential. His very presence at Texas A&M always seemed to me a living anachronism that, by his perseverance, openness, vision, insight, and compassion, he transformed into a remarkable adventure for himself, his students and colleagues, and for the university. That sense of anachronism of a born and bred New Yorker at home in the heart of rural Texas was encapsulated for me upon my first visit to A&M. John insisted that I join him in attending the students' traditional pre-football game nighttime bonfire. Then my wife and I joined John and Patricia at the Texas A&M football game the following day. There we were, in 90-plus degree weather, with John in his black suit, tie, and black hat, pipe in hand, and Patricia in her beautiful pink dress, all of us being well-baked by the noonday sun—but completely involved in the game, sharing the excitement of the students' celebration of the Twelfth Man ritual, and he did not feel the least out of place.

When I reflect now on his death, I feel a deep sense of profound loss. Of an irreplaceable presence whose departure leaves a gaping absence. So many who have encountered him know what he has meant to them personally and intellectually. Still others have benefited from his unflagging commitment to the rebirth and revitalization of American philosophy. He labored long and hard to re-present the works of William James, Josiah Royce, and John Dewey, to mention only the most obvious. He also engaged in pioneering work, playing a leading role in bringing the educational theory and practice of Maria Montessori to American education. Beyond that, he has spoken and written in uniquely insightful ways on the American experience, its uniqueness, and its relation to other cultures. And he endeavored to create institutions that would carry this work forward, not the least of which is the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy. But for me, however important were and remain his original personal essays, his scholarly research, his educational innovations, and his institutional constructions—and they are all significant—it was his personal engagement as a teacher and mentor to myself, and to so many others, that truly marked him as a unique and irreplaceable human being. My personal debt to him is incalculable. I miss him already.

A STUDENT'S MEMORY OF JOHN McDERMOTT

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*Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?*

—Mary Oliver, “The Summer Day”

Queens College, in the 1960s, was (and still is) a large, urban, public university; it was (though no longer) free. If there had been no tuition-free college, my parents would likely have sent me to a secretarial school to prepare me for a job as, maybe, a typist, so I could fill the time before I got married, started a family, and became a homemaker. Although they did not, like Henry James, Sr., see colleges as hotbeds of depravity, higher education was not something my parents valued, especially for a girl. College seemed irrelevant to the future I was supposed to inhabit, which seemed to me at once starkly vivid and inevitable (a husband and a home of my own) and terrifyingly vague (if not that, then what?). I was the first person in my immediate family to go to college, and I had no idea, really, what to expect—from my education and certainly from myself. The word ‘transformative’ was nowhere in my vocabulary.

Grateful as I was to be in college at all, Queens felt like a bigger version of my large, urban high school. There were many required classes to complete and these, apart from language classes and science labs, were, for the most part, lectures. One was not: a required class in English composition, for whom my professor was the Ruskin scholar Helen Gill Viljoen. With a few exceptions, Viljoen emerged as one of the few teachers I remember from my undergraduate experience. She was gentle, low-key, incisive, and focused. The textbook we used for the class was one she had co-edited, *A Preface to Our Day*, which contained essays by writers who I knew were crucially important to my education: Milton, Matthew Arnold, Emerson, and, of course, Ruskin, among them. The essays were challenging, about such lofty subjects as aesthetics, morality, censorship, and social responsibility. I can't imagine what my own essays were like, but Prof. Viljoen made me—and my efforts at writing—feel valued and respected in ways that no other teacher ever had before. Her office, though redolent with stale cigarette smoke, felt like a precious, sunlit space, and our meetings, for me, privileged moments.

I never felt, though, that the mostly 19th century men whose works dominated the curriculum in English composition—and those whose ideas I encountered in so many other classes—were once living, breathing, vital, and vibrant human beings. They were, to put it succinctly, dead, and to imagine them as alive seemed completely beside the point. The point, as I understood it in my first semesters in college, was to become literate in great books, great men, and their great ideas; to fill in names on a timeline of Western culture. There was an introduction to music, where, for the first time in my life, I heard the works of classical composers. I think I was not alone: the professor imparted the news that one does not applaud at the breaks between movements. With that advice, I thought I had been given a key to the kingdom. There was an introduction to art history, where, for the first time in my life (my family did not go to museums), I saw slides of Greek sculpture and Renaissance paintings. And there was a required survey course called Western Civilization.

In that class I encountered a professor as different from Helen Gill Viljoen as anyone could be: John McDermott. Was it in Western Civ. that I first read William James? Or Emerson, Camus, Heidegger, Kant? Was it in Western Civ. that McDermott recommended—well, insisted, as he bounded across the room—that we all read a startling new work of science fiction, William J. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz?*, where we would find characters engaged in issues that, we were learning, were not limited to the domain of philosophers: the search for truth, the tension between science and religion, the thorny question of individual responsibility to others and to the future. These were the issues that recurred in McDermott's other classes as well, which I took, along with so many other students, philosophy majors or not, who were bitten by the scintillating energy of his teaching style.

When I became a college professor myself, I encountered among my colleagues a range of teaching styles: the pontificator, the clown, the performer; some who wanted to be cool, some who decidedly did not; some who would have preferred to be anywhere but in the classroom, and others who seemed genuinely to thrive there. From my perspective as a student, McDermott was one of the latter. I had no idea then that pedagogy was central to his recently completed doctoral dissertation, but it was clear that pedagogy was more than theoretical: it was urgent. And teaching was not merely a matter of exposing students to great men and their great ideas but leading these credulous young people to doubt—those ideas, and themselves—opening them, as he once put it, “to novelty, surprise, and the dismaying message” that their beliefs “may have been self-foreclosing.”¹

Surely, he knew that at a free city college, his teenaged students were not culturally or economically privileged, and we were raised with prescriptions, and deeply-embedded proscriptions, for our future. Teenaged rebellion seemed like a noisy eruption that some enacted, and left behind, with little consequence. To embark on a journey to the unknown was, our elders warned, to tempt fate. The world was dangerous, hubris was punished, and those who strayed

from a well-worn path courted failure: a typist could always get a job. Anyone with a 'big idea' was a buffoon.

But McDermott laced his classes with surprising autobiographical tidbits about his young family, his mother, his siblings, the trajectory of his own life: "It may be of interest to know," he summarized his career later, "that an urban, proletarian ethnic from a large, economically scarred family can wind up having taught philosophy, letters, history, and matters cultural to more than twenty thousand students."² Not to mention hundreds of lectures throughout the world, abundant publications, and scores of honors.³ As his student, it was of great interest to know this: of great interest and inspiration.

Empowerment, like transformation, was not a word in my vocabulary, although it must have been current in the culture of the 1960s, because McDermott found the term "gratuitously overused in our time. For William James and for McDermott, hear 'possibilities,' 'energies.'"⁴ But even these words were not quite right: "Although modest in intonation," he added, "the explosive word is 'congenial,' by which James means that we are 'in on something.'"⁵ I yearned to believe in possibilities. "We ought," James wrote, "to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*."⁶ I was all too familiar with a feeling of *and*; *if* and *but* seemed too daring to contemplate.

Arthur Lothstein, another former Queens College student from the 1960s, ebulliently described McDermott as "the Johnny Appleseed of philosophers" who treated his students as "clipped buds desperately in need of recultivation"—seeding, mulching, weeding, and irrigating—in a rich garden of ideas.⁷ "McDermott's passion for ideas is so contagious," Lothstein recalled, "that you actually find yourself caring about whether the world is a vanilla monism in which there is nothing new under the sun, or a tutti-frutti pluralism..."⁸ McDermott's classes were "afire with the language of possibility, chance, edge, novelty, and risk."⁹ These were classes where *if* and *but* were vibrant invitations to think, to act, and to be.

Among the thinkers we studied, James, of course, stood out brilliantly. McDermott created James as a live presence in those

classes, a complicated man unafraid to be contradictory and uncertain. A philosopher for whom salient questions were much more crucial than answers; who followed unblazed trails: on mountains and thought and in the course of his life. “We realize this life as something always off its balance,” he wrote,

something in transition, something that shoots out of a darkness through a dawn into a brightness that we feel to be the dawn fulfilled. In the very midst of the continuity our experience comes as an alteration. ‘Yes,’ we say at the full brightness, ‘*this* is what I just meant.’¹⁰

I learned from McDermott’s classes that my education, in college and beyond, would—and should—throw me off balance, pushing me from darkness to, I hoped, some brightness yet unknown to me. I learned, as James put it, “What really *exists* is not things made but things in the making.”¹¹

Years later, when I read memoirs recalling William James as a teacher, I recognized qualities that I saw in McDermott. A Harvard graduate student in the 1880s recalled the “originality” of James’s teaching style, his charm and energy. “We appreciated fully,” wrote Edmund Burke Delabarre, “his remarkable genius for felicitous, clear and picturesque expression...”¹² James’s lectures, another student remembered, “were always vitalizing. No studied rhetoric. Always happy turns of intriguing phrases, a glow of warmth and meaning.”¹³ “He was in a marked degree unpretending, unconventional, human and direct. The one thing apparently impossible to him,” Dickinson Sargeant Miller remarked about James’s teaching, “was to speak in an *ex cathedra* throne from heights of scientific erudition and attainment.”¹⁴ While James’s colleague Josiah Royce “sat immovable” in class, “James would rise with a peculiar suddenness and make bold and rapid strokes for a diagram on the black-board” and, with a “look of human and mellow consideration,” address his attentive students.¹⁵ Both James and McDermott, as teachers, showed a remarkable empathy for their students; they insisted that philosophy was none other than a

personal quest, and they shared a visceral excitement about idiosyncrasy and the intensity of *now*.

Unlike some of McDermott's other students, I did not pursue philosophy as a graduate student or teacher but instead brought what he had inspired in me to my writing, and, not least, to the choices I made in my life. As a biographer and cultural historian, my subjects have been men and women who chose paths that defied others' expectations. A reviewer once remarked that I was drawn to mavericks, which seems apt. All of them asked, as James did, as McDermott did, "What makes a life significant?" All of them responded, as McDermott once wrote, "The distinctively personal ingredient should color all of our activities, otherwise we live in the gray of correctness, external and dead to the world and to ourselves."¹⁶ And all of them struggled—often off balance, often in darkness—to face the perilous and the risky: to discover, as poet Mary Oliver put it so incisively—and as McDermott urged us to discover—what they might dare to do with their own wild and precious life.

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- ¹ McDermott, "Possibility or Else!," 132.
- ² McDermott, "Afterward: You Are Really Able," 270.
- ³ McDermott, 270.
- ⁴ McDermott, "Possibility or Else!," 133.
- ⁵ McDermott, 133.
- ⁶ James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 245.
- ⁷ Lothstein, "No Eros, No Buds" 180.
- ⁸ Lothstein, 183.
- ⁹ Lothstein, 184-85.
- ¹⁰ James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 283.
- ¹¹ James, 263.
- ¹² Delabarre, "James in the Late '80s," 113.
- ¹³ Starbuck, "James in the Middle '90s," 168.
- ¹⁴ Miller, "A Memory," 125.
- ¹⁵ Miller, 129.
- ¹⁶ McDermott, "Possibility or Else!," 135.

THE McDERMOTT WALK

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For the past forty-one years, Texas A&M students who wandered across the beautifully landscaped and tree-studded campus passed a short man seated on a bench, clad in a fedora, puffing profusely on his pipe. John J. McDermott died this past fall, leaving a void in Aggieland that no single person could ever fill. Yet even in this great sadness, McDermott managed to teach us something about ourselves and left us a gift whose significance which will take time to be fully understood and appreciated—the “McDermott Walk.” This paper is about my dear friend and teacher, the life-changing assignment he gave me, and the remarkable difference he has made and continues to make in my life and the lives of my students.

I was a doctoral student in the Sociology Department at Texas A&M from August of 2012 to May of 2017. Halfway through my training, my friends and mentors recommended I take a class with the famous philosophy professor, John J. McDermott. I enrolled in his American Philosophy class in the spring of 2015, and over the course of the semester, proceeded to be more confused, confounded, understood, and cared about than at any prior point in my education. The following semester, I and several of my friends signed up for his class on the philosophy of John Dewey. McDermott and I were talking after class, and I told him that my studies had brought me to

the brink of an existential crises and I didn't know if I could keep going, if I should give up, and what difference either decision made in the grand scheme of things. He recommended that I take a "McDermott Walk" and that such a walk would entail leaving my phone at home and wandering someplace for an hour alone with my thoughts. I thought this sounded naïve and it showed on my face, but McDermott was undeterred, and he told me that my thoughts should center on two questions. The first question was, how are you doing? The second was, what, if anything, could I do to make it better?

I was, to put in bluntly, less than pleased with this existential assignment. I had always spent a lot of time in my head examining my thoughts and my feelings, so I saw little reason to dedicate time to doing it while walking and, perhaps more important to me at the time, I felt like naming a walk after oneself was pretentious. Still, my teacher told me to do it, and I was nothing if not a dedicated student, so I went for my walk as I was told. I cannot recall clearly the thoughts which arose from the questions that I had on that first walk, but I recall the end result of that walk: hope.

I wanted to run to McDermott and thank him for his advice and for his assignment, but I didn't. I could not face him and admit that I had thought he was clueless and naïve prior to my walk and, to my lasting horror, I had found the shoe was on the other foot. Several weeks later, I was walking him to his car after class. We made our way from bench to bench with McDermott smoking like a chimney and me carrying his worn leather bag. He asked me if I did the walk; I told him that I did. He asked if I got any answers to my questions; I told him that I had. He didn't press me or gloat that he was right, but something tells me that he could see it in my eyes that he had helped, and that was enough for him. He told me that he had taken those walks often and they had really helped him over the years, and that was it. It was but another example of how McDermott genuinely cared what happened to me, what happened to every student who walked through his classroom door. It was an ethos I would never forget and, after graduating and landing a teaching position at The

University of Texas at San Antonio, it was an ethos that I was given a chance to practice and preach.

McDermott read widely and found as many insights in philosophy as he did in literature, art, and everyday experiences. Among the treasured insights he shared was his echo of Plato, “philosophy is *therapeia*”—a healing. I had always thought it strange that the PhD conferred the title of “doctor,” but my experiences have proved such a title to be insightful rather than misplaced. Augustine famously noted that the church is like a hospital for sinners, but what of the classroom? The classroom, McDermott noted, was a place where the wounded put on a brave face and where teachers had more in common with battlefield nurses than generals—it is little wonder that he made such a contribution in the philosophy of medicine.

The metaphor of the battlefield nurse is appropriate, for teachers are a part of many battles in the lives of their students, but we are also needed when the battle is over and the wounded need to be tended. McDermott cared for us, his students, and he cared about doing things the right way and helping us even when it was difficult and personally costly to him. There were many success stories about students he helped and who were grateful for the kindness and patience he showed them. McDermott received multiple emails and letters every week from former students who wanted to touch base with him and to thank him for a kindness he bestowed on them in times of need. On one occasion, I was with him when he read a letter from a student at Queens College. Her father had died right before finals week and she was in no condition to take final exams. As a token of good will, McDermott excused her from her remaining work and gave her the grade she had earned up until that point in the semester. Decades later, she wrote to him thanking him for his exceptional kindness and understanding in an impossibly difficult and confusing time in her life and, noting proudly, she had finished reading the books he had recommended all the students read. I was touched by the letter and confused by the reading list comment. McDermott then shared that his reading list was meant for a lifetime,

not a semester, and I understood that my teacher taught us for a semester and hoped to help us the rest of our lives.

Equally brilliant and insightful, McDermott awakened Heraclitus' dictum, "to know thyself," in every student who listened to him lecture—which was also to listen to him tell stories. It was McDermott's stories that taught me, and tens of thousands of students just like me, that philosophy was more than rhetoric, logic, and concepts—it was a way of being. But being is more than just existence, it requires a person be awake. McDermott's gift as an educator was that he knew we were aesthetically and spiritually asleep, that we were not aware of this, and that he would never ask us to face up to this on our own. I use the phrase "spiritually asleep" not to denote a condition without religion, but rather, a state of being where the deepest part of the soul lies dormant before the towering expectations of external circumstance. In such a state, one's being is infected with an abominable loneliness and hopelessness. This state McDermott knew all too well, and he explored it in his essay, "A Jamesian Personscape: The Fringe as Messaging to the Sick Soul." When one surveys the breadth of McDermott's work on the American experience, one notes that the surprising thing is not that some people are miserable and depressed, but that everyone is not miserable and depressed. Still, such an analysis has proved deeply insightful about the American experience, not just because it raises important questions about our history but because it recognizes how widespread suffering—whether physical, emotional, spiritual, relational, etc.—is in the American story and the many attempts by people high and low to alleviate it. In short, McDermott's work reminds us that we do not suffer alone, if only we care to reflect on our heritage and tradition.

McDermott, echoing Dewey, taught us that humans are born with a desire to understand, but it takes some preparation to check in oneself as well as one's "self." Reflection may be native and constant, as Dewey cautioned us, but it can also be uncomfortable, confusing, and disorienting—like being shackled in Plato's cave. McDermott offered an existential take on the aforementioned allegory, noting life was but a series of caves where each escape was

foiled by the temptation and resignation to walk into another. Not everyone agreed, of course, but the more we thought about it and talked about it, the more troubling the lesson became. After all, who among us has not returned to a bad habit or poor coping strategy precisely at the moment we most need to inculcate new habits? Perhaps because of such struggles, McDermott emphasized the importance of relationships, hope, and service as core tenants of his pedagogy. He emphasized the importance of teachers getting to know their students and, more importantly, he emphasized that great teachers know themselves.

When I graduated with my PhD in sociology in August of 2017, I felt I knew a great deal about myself and my teaching philosophy. I had attended McDermott's philosophical pedagogy class twice, I had three years of teaching experience, and I was named one of Texas A&M's Outstanding Graduate Students for Excellence in Teaching. When I started my new job at UTSA, I missed meeting with my grad school friends, I missed meeting with my faculty mentors, and I missed feeling like part of a community. As a new faculty member, I had occasion to talk to students from all walks of life who were experiencing existential hardship brought on by living lives their parents, relatives, teachers, and coaches had wanted for them. The students would recount their troubles to me, and in my mind, I would hear McDermott telling us, "The most perilous threat to human life is second-handedness."

In an effort to help my students live a life on their own terms, I instituted the assignment that my teacher, mentor, and friend had given me three years prior. I knew the McDermott Walk required a student to be willing to listen to their inner voice, a voice they have usually stopped listening to by the time they get in the college classroom, and I was worried that the assignment would be a failure. My students did struggle with this, but I explained that the inner voice speaks when the mind stops churning, which requires students to be free of the distractions of technology, including their cell phones. This inner voice speaks in a different tone, it uses short sentences, and its messages are never ambiguous. It is similar in many ways to one's conscience, but conscience mandates what one

should do and should not do. Some students are skeptical about the existence of the inner voice; they think that I am crazy and the assignment is a trick. Furthermore, some find all talk of deeper longings and spiritual needs to be devoid of meaning and “too religious.” But an hour alone with one’s inner voice is an eternity when one has not been keeping tabs on their inner life, and the realizations struck are decisive. The inner voice speaks of the deepest needs of an individual; it whispers of “*sehnsucht*,” of a longing impossible to satisfy within one’s immediate experiences.

Since I am intent on students discovering this longing, I send them out on their walks with explicit instructions to ask themselves how they are doing and to not answer reflexively. I tell them that the papers of previous McDermott Walkers are filled with self-loathing, despair, loneliness, and the smoldering embers of hope. I tell them the most important part of the walk is to make a promise *before* one sets out that one will be honest with oneself. Students know that keeping one’s promises is important, but they are surprised when I note that they break promises to themselves each and every day. They say, “I will study for two hours today,” and then they study for five hours. They say, “I will only watch one episode of TV and then go exercise,” and they watch a whole season. In each case, they have taught themselves that they cannot trust themselves. Thus, another part of the walk is to develop the habit of keeping one’s promises, both to oneself, and then to others.

More often than not, students include their skepticisms as asides in their papers, noting with astonishment, that so much could be going on inside of them that they had so little knowledge of. This is usually manifest in the most common realization, “I’m not okay.” The reasons for this realization vary widely, but a common theme runs through many of them and that is the hopelessness and pointlessness they feel in the face of their suffering.

Confronted by their suffering, existential angst sets in and the student struggles to make sense of their world. It is at this decisive moment when the pulse of the McDermott Walk—the desire to understand—roars to life like a pile of dead leaves ignited by a lightning strike. The questions come pouring out:

“Who am I?”
“What do I want?”
“What do I believe?”
“Does my life even matter?”
“Will I ever be happy?”
“Why him?”
“Why her?”
“Why me???”

An eighteen-year-old male student writes that he seeks a PhD in aerospace engineering to one-up his father, who has a PhD in mechanical engineering and whose approval he longs for daily but never receives. An eighteen-year-old female student records her resentment towards her special needs sister who has viciously beaten her during her autistic episodes, and her shame that she cannot be more understanding and loving towards her sister. A seventeen-year-old male student writes about the guilt he feels that he is attending a university when his older sister, who is a much better student than him, was denied the opportunity to attend college because his family didn't think it was important for her to do so. An eighteen-year-old female student opens up about being physically assaulted for years by her stepfather and how her mother has recently started physically assaulting her as well. A twenty-five-year-old male student talks about being in and out of jail from the time he was seventeen and his sense of accomplishment at cleaning up his life and finally being able to enlist in the military.

To read a student's McDermott Walk is to stumble into their “cave,” to shackle oneself next to them on the floor, and to see the shadows on the inside of their cave as they do. It is to feel their helplessness, their hatred, their fear, their anger, their love, their rejection, their disappointment, and their hope. It is a humbling, painful, and often messy assignment, but the students, having faced themselves beyond the veil of illusion, walk away pleased with the assignment even when the discoveries are painful. They talk of taking more walks like this one and sharing the assignment with

their families and friends whose mental and spiritual health they are concerned about.

Perhaps most encouraging of all, they learn to validate the suffering of others as well as their own suffering. Such changes are not merely intellectual, they are more noble, harkening back to the Jewish concept of “*teshuvah*”—to a turn of the heart. The language of conversion falls short here, for the students find both a new version of themselves as well as new eyes through which to see themselves. It is impossible to say which precedes the other, as the walk facilitates an interpenetrating dialogue between the self as it is and the self as it longs to be.

But it is this sense of longing, described earlier as “*sehnsucht*,” which students find most shocking about the whole assignment, since what they find they long for is rarely what they have been pursuing. It is this problem of the incompatibility between what they really need and what they have thought they have been needing which requires the greatest care. I spend close to thirty minutes writing comments for each paper, tailoring my message to specific problems discussed by the student and often recommending counseling services. After the grading is done, I tell them as a class that I worry about them, that their problems are important, and that they will forever be my students even after they finish my class and graduate. This final validation officially ends the McDermott Walk assignment, but all endings are also beginnings—as McDermott reminded me so many times.

For weeks after, students come pouring into office hours wanting to know if I read their paper or if it was my teaching assistant who graded it. They sit, searching my body language and tone for signs of disapproval, wondering if they have forever shattered my view of them with what they have shared. It is in these vulnerable moments that my discussions with McDermott come rushing back to me. Their problems are different. Their strengths are different. Their hopes are different. So, I do for them what McDermott did for me so many times—I listen. It’s not much, but McDermott taught me that small things are often enough when done with the right disposition. He taught me this every time he listened

to me complain about my dissertation, every time he told me about his time teaching in New York City, every time he was excited for me when something went well in my class. He was the greatest of teachers and I was proud to be his student.

McDermott was a philosophical giant with a servant's heart, and I know that he is proud of all of his students every time we teach a person to live by living the life we teach. The McDermott Walk assignment is part of my journey of philosophizing, my mode of being in the world. I offer it to my students not for the mere promise of points but for the possibility of understanding and healing. It is an invitation to enter into an "I" and "thou" relationship with all the parts of your person and, in doing so, to join the community of McDermott Walkers that stretches over the decades in an unbroken continuity back to McDermott himself. There is a mystery or drama that is native to possibility and which raises one final question. Where will you walk with McDermott and me?

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A version of this paper was read at McDermott's graveside funeral.

ROBERT POLLOCK'S INFLUENCE ON JOHN McDERMOTT

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This paper explores the relation between the thought of the contemporary American philosopher, John J. McDermott, and that of his doctoral advisor, Robert C. Pollock of Fordham University. What becomes apparent in this comparison is that, while the two thinkers both express a high regard for the writing of such philosophers as Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, and John Dewey, Pollock expresses a further commitment to aspects of the Christian/Catholic tradition that McDermott does not share.



ROBERT CHANNON POLLOCK

- 1901 Born in Glasgow, Scotland (30 March)
Immigrated to Chicago
- 1921–25 Harvard University bachelor’s degree (philosophy and experimental psychology)
Converted from Judaism to Catholicism
- 1925–27 Harvard University master’s degree (Experimental Psychology)
- 1927–30 Taught at Bowdoin College
- 1930–32 Doctoral study at the Institute of Mediaeval Studies, University of Toronto
- 1932 PhD: “The Doctrine of Rectitude in St. Anselm”
- 1932–36 Taught at Notre Dame University
- 1936–66 Taught at Fordham University
- 1942 Published “Catholic Philosophy and American Culture”
- 1950 Published “The Basis of Philosophical Anthropology”
Contributor to Luigi Sturzo’s *Del Metodo Sociologico*
- 1951 Published “History is a Matrix”
- 1952 Published “Freedom and History”
- 1953 Edited “Luigi Sturzo: An Anthology of His Writings,”
Published “[William] James: Pragmatism”
- 1954 “The Person in American Society”
- 1955 Editor of *The Mind of Pius XII*
- 1957 Published “A Reappraisal of Emerson”
[reprinted as “Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882: The Single Vision”]
- 1960 “Process and Experience” [Dewey]
Fulbright Professor, Luigi Sturzo Institute, Rome
- 1966– Taught at Seton Hall University
- 1968 Published “Dream and Nightmare: The Future as Revolution”
- 1976 “Emerson and America’s Future” [published in 1988]
- 1978 Died in NYC (30 May)

I

Previously, I have commented on aspects of the philosophical work of John Joseph McDermott.¹ Rather than attempting to advance that inquiry on this occasion, I have decided to consider the possible influence on McDermott's work by his doctoral advisor at Fordham University, Robert Channon Pollock (1901-1978). In various interactions with McDermott over the years, I have been intrigued by his championing of Pollock, who has remained virtually unknown within broader American Philosophy circles.² This essay is an initial attempt to consider Pollock's influence on McDermott.

In 1967, McDermott noted his "gratitude for Robert C. Pollock, who has opened three generations of Fordham University graduate students to the richness of the thought of James. His insights into the world of process, contemporary humanism and to the lasting drama of Western culture, are legendary among those who have heard him lecture."³ McDermott concluded: "Robert Pollock stands out in our time as one who embodies the majestic vision of William James."⁴ In 1969, McDermott writes that his "concern for the thought of Josiah Royce dates from lectures given some fifteen years ago [in the mid-1950s] by Robert C. Pollock, then professor of philosophy at Fordham University," who was "the only person who, in my experience, could make the full case for James and Royce."⁵ McDermott continued in his edition of the writings of John Dewey in 1972 to acknowledge "the imaginative teaching and writing of Robert C. Pollock."⁶ Once again in 1985, McDermott offered his "gratitude for the pedagogical genius of Robert C. Pollock."⁷

Who was this Robert C. Pollock who, especially through his lecturing and pedagogy, so influenced McDermott (and others) but who left us only a modest published record by means of which we can encounter him directly?⁸ Pollock was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and raised Jewish there and in Chicago. He later studied philosophy and psychology at Harvard University, where he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees while studying with such professors as Alfred North Whitehead and William McDougall.

During his time at Harvard, Pollock converted to Catholicism, and he later earned his doctorate in philosophy at the University of Toronto after studying at the Institute of Mediaeval Studies. Among his teachers there were Etienne Gilson and Gerald Bernard Phelan.⁹ Pollock taught in the graduate school at Fordham from 1936-1966, bringing alive for his students the intricacies of Medieval and American Philosophy.¹⁰ McDermott himself studied with Pollock at Fordham, where he earned his M.A. in 1954 (aet. 22) and his Ph.D. in 1959 (aet. 27); his doctoral dissertation, "Experience Is Pedagogical: The Genesis and Essence of the American Nineteenth-Century Notion of Experience," was directed by Pollock.

II

In this initial sketch of Pollock's importance to McDermott, I will first attempt to present Pollock's general philosophical approach. My method will be to examine a trio of overlapping essays that he published between 1953 and 1960 on the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, and John Dewey.¹¹ As a set, these essays adumbrate a philosophic and pedagogic vision, emphasizing the general themes of context, process, and experience, that is worthy of careful study. Pollock writes, for example, that in order to understand any philosopher it is necessary to recognize that thinker's context.¹² "No philosophical work can be satisfactorily interpreted until we ascertain the context wherein its meaning may be discerned," he writes.¹³ "It is necessary, therefore, to view every such work in its historical setting, while taking into account whatever can render the thought of the philosopher comprehensible, such as the tendencies and crucial issues of the period under consideration, the state of knowledge and the new intellectual atmosphere in which old problems were set."¹⁴ This contextual approach "also calls for a progressive widening of perspective, so as to embrace finally a whole cultural evolution as the proper field wherein the philosopher's work can be objectified and evaluated."¹⁵ It is also helpful, Pollock writes, to understand the development in

any philosopher's thought as the result of "a continuous search for the deeper meaning" of that philosopher's own ideas.¹⁶

Pollock's contextual approach is not a static one, and a conception of the interaction of creative factors within time perhaps better reaches his understanding of context-in-process. McDermott writes that under Pollock's tutelage, he "came to realize that philosophy, and creative thought of any persuasion, was manifest in and through an historical matrix."¹⁷ As Pollock himself writes: "History is far too complex an affair to permit of our disposing of a man's lifework with a few pigeonhole generalities."¹⁸ Using Emerson as his exemplar, Pollock notes that "in him great historical forces came to expression, forces which ... have a core of rightness, even if he himself was not able to express them with an ideal perfection."¹⁹ If in our work we are conscious of these shifting emphases, we will be better able to uncover our subject's "thoughts and attitudes" and to enter into them "more sympathetically."²⁰ As Pollock continues elsewhere, "[w]ith the maturation of the historical sense and the genetic point of view ushered in by evolutionary theories, a respect for the temporal and becoming aspect of things took a firm hold of men's minds."²¹

A third of Pollock's central emphases is the focus upon "the actual data of experience."²² He continues that "once human experience was viewed in the more all-inclusive relationships of history, and on the developmental plane," people came to recognize the need "to examine the problem of knowledge afresh."²³ The dual theme of the primacy of experience and the need to rethink knowledge thus shaped the pragmatic movement. "The origin of the pragmatic movement in philosophy coincides," Pollock writes,

with the ripening of age-old tendencies and a multiplication of ferments which left no sphere of human activity untouched. ... As the point of convergence of a potentially infinite number of perspectives, the human mind's interest in itself was enormously intensified, with the result that experience in its widest range assumed a commanding position.²⁴

Pollock is careful to balance any emphasis upon individual experience with a recognition of the social experience of community. As he writes, “the convergence of such differentiated minds as those of [Charles Sanders] Peirce, James, Dewey and [George Herbert] Mead bears witness to a rich experience shared in common, as well as to a common awareness of the need for a fresh appraisal of things.”²⁵ As we continue through an examination of these three essays in sequence, we will see how Pollock’s pedagogic vision is both strongly supportive of, and strongly critical of, the philosophies of Emerson, James, and Dewey.

III

In 1958, Pollock published “Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882: The Single Vision.” The subtitle of this essay refers to Emerson’s rejection of “a split universe”—“a universe in which the life of the spirit is insulated from man’s life in nature”—and his advocacy that we recognize instead “an experiential wholeness.”²⁶ Pollock’s overall view of Emerson is that he was a “highly disciplined” thinker who, while “primarily a literary figure,” saw reality as a whole and consequently needed “to function constructively on a theoretical level.”²⁷ Still, Pollock reads Emerson as a thinker who approaches idealism as a weapon to counter materialism more than as a comprehensive doctrine.²⁸ Idealism was for Emerson not to be understood as a complete system to be believed, and he thus had no need to create a fully functioning idealistic theory.²⁹ Other themes that Pollock emphasizes in Emerson are the latter’s assertion in his address at the Divinity School “that God is, not was; that He speaketh, not spake,” and his call, in consequence, that we be ready to place ourselves “firmly in the present” with a faith “in the human soul itself through which God makes Himself heard”;³⁰ the “affirmation of the vertical or spiritual as against the horizontal or temporal axis in history” to free people from “a deadly fixation on the past”;³¹ and the belief that an authentic individual is not “a spiritually self-sufficient entity ... devoid of all ties to the universe”

but rather a person among persons "bound together by common roots which run underground."³²

We find in Pollock, however, a number of criticisms of Emerson's position. Perhaps in line with Emerson's negative remarks on the strait-jacket of consistency, Pollock notes that thinkers, Emerson included, are victims of "inevitable confusions, which only a lifetime of personal growth could eliminate, at least in part."³³ In spite of what he had said about Emerson's recognition of the social place of the authentic individual, Pollock still criticizes him for treating it too much as an "ideal" and thus for failing to advocate "the actual expansion of communal life."³⁴ History, Pollock writes, "is essentially the process of man's unfolding within the developing forms of associated life."³⁵ Emerson's failure to grasp the necessity for "social and institutional development" leaves him unable to advance his actual point of differentiating between "a genuine and a spurious individuality," a failing that is often manifest as an "antagonism between individual self-culture and community-mindedness."³⁶ Further, Pollock believes that Emerson needed "to confront the problem and mystery of evil more adequately than he did."³⁷ Indicating that Emerson "had dedicated himself to the task of reattaching men to their own experience," Pollock continues that he violates "the data of experience" by "dealing only obliquely with that which bites so deeply into our lives, namely, evil itself."³⁸ Shifting his perspective, Pollock continues that "[i]f Emerson had made a serious study of Catholic thought, he would have been struck by the masterful way" in which it handles the problem of evil.³⁹ More broadly, Pollock writes that had Emerson "had a better acquaintance with the Classical-Christian tradition, he would have been entranced by its marvelous fusion of elements so dear to him" that it contained.⁴⁰ Among these were a fuller sense of nature that is both material and spiritual, an appreciation of experience as "sensuous, intellectual, and mystical," a recognition of "transcendent truth," and a sense of both measure and "the immeasurable."⁴¹ Sadly, however, Emerson allowed "his rejection of Puritan Christianity to cloud his mind in regard to Catholic Christianity itself."⁴²

IV

Pollock's 1953 essay on William James, "James: Pragmatism," emphasizes the importance of approaching him as "a great human being" and "a loveable figure" who offers us a comprehensive worldview.⁴³ Unlike many commentators on James's philosophy in his day, Pollock sees in James a broad pragmatism that should be recognized within "his breadth of vision, his openness to possibilities and the whole searching character of his thought."⁴⁴ He attempts to address big problems, "the everlasting problems of philosophy, especially as they touch on moral and religious life," and "to see life in the round."⁴⁵ Pollock continues that James also understood that human action is related to our attempts at understanding. James, he writes, "was endeavoring to take seriously the fact that reality does not address itself to abstract minds but to living persons inhabiting a real world, to whom it makes known something of its essential quality only as they go out to meet it through action."⁴⁶ The relation of mind to the world "is no static, aimless, unmotivated affair, ... no passive reception on the part of a supposedly neutral intellect."⁴⁷ Rather, our grasping of reality is "a vital act involving the whole operative personality."⁴⁸ In this analysis, Pollock notes that concepts "enlarge our vision of the real, provided they are redirected into experience," and "our ideas have not fulfilled their function until they rejoin experience."⁴⁹ James further demonstrates "a real and positive concern with the problem of truth, and not from any desire to evade it."⁵⁰ Pollock also writes that James "construed experience in a much wider sense than was usually done and was always ready to extend its scope."⁵¹ This expansion requires that we regard our intellectual successes as "triumphs of the human spirit seeking fullness of life" that function within "an epistemology of the person rather than of the mind taken in isolation."⁵²

As with Emerson, however, Pollock finds difficulties in James's thought. Some of them are to be expected. He cautions us, for example, that we will inevitably have trouble with any radical thinker. "Man has seldom advanced to a more inclusive standpoint,"

he writes, "without throwing well-tested concepts out of alignment and creating new difficulties for himself."⁵³ As a result, any "fuller clarification of the new standpoint is the task of those who come after."⁵⁴ Thus, Pollock prefers to read James as "groping to something more significant than the doctrine popularly attributed to him," and observes that James will need our help if we are to make the most of his insights.⁵⁵ Pollock also points repeatedly to other problems that he finds in James's philosophy. For example, he writes that James's attempts to oppose vicious intellectualism drift "dangerously close at times to a vicious anti-intellectualism."⁵⁶ Further, Pollock notes that James's work contains "inconsistencies and metaphysical ambiguity," "metaphysical fallacies," "epistemological and metaphysical deficiencies," and "metaphysical inadequacies,"⁵⁷ although he does not explicitly state the perspective from which these criticisms arise. Also, especially with regard to James's pragmatism, Pollock reminds us that he emphasized "the actual life pattern of the individual to the detriment of the objective character of knowledge," thus failing "to safeguard the transcendence of truths to which reason has access."⁵⁸ As a result, James's pragmatism cannot offer us "a comprehensive or even truly integral account of knowledge."⁵⁹ We must seek, instead, "a fuller meaning of pragmatism" that would match James's "breadth of vision, his openness to possibilities and the whole searching character of his thought."⁶⁰ This fuller pragmatism will be possible only if we integrate "a heightened perception of man as an integral whole, while stressing the multiple aspects and versatility of his nature and the many ties that bind him to reality" that Pollock sees as resulting "from the Christian doctrine of personality."⁶¹

V

Pollock's 1960 essay on Dewey, "Process and Experience," that McDermott characterized in 1972 as "still the best essay on the philosophy of John Dewey,"⁶² gives strong evidence of Pollock's familiarity with the breadth of Dewey's thought, including "his constant preoccupation with the field of education."⁶³ He especially

emphasizes Dewey's recognition of our position within a new intellectual world. "John Dewey's philosophy is itself a powerful reminder of the intimate connection between the life of thought and the real-life situations which so vividly characterize the human story," Pollock writes.⁶⁴ He continues that "it would betray extraordinary obtuseness to attempt an exposition of Dewey's thought without taking account of a fundamental transformation in human awareness which created a new cultural atmosphere and gave to consciousness itself a new orientation."⁶⁵ Here Pollock points to Dewey's emphasis on an open future. Following Dewey's "new image of the universe," we must both assume an evolutionary perspective and proceed into a "linear and progressive history" that endows our abilities to experiment and create "with a new dignity."⁶⁶ When we fully recognize Dewey's emphasis upon what he called "the possibility of novelty, of invention, of radical deviation,"⁶⁷ Pollock indicates that we will be forced to recognize further that change is "at the very heart of things," that we live in "an open and incomplete universe."⁶⁸ He continues that for Americans "the notion of an unfinished world was indelibly fixed in the mind by everyday experiences."⁶⁹ Finally, since "in a truly temporal world, the mind must ever face forward," Dewey advocated pragmatic intelligence as the only one that is "adequate to change, transformation and novelty";⁷⁰ and, although Dewey did not allow for "the notion of the universe as an ethical drama," Pollock notes that "terms like 'faith' and 'piety' sprang readily to Dewey's lips."⁷¹

At the same time that he offers this praise for Dewey, Pollock also offers numerous criticisms. Despite his regard for the present and future, for example, Dewey "was singularly lacking in power of penetration into the past" or in interest in what "lies beyond time."⁷² Moreover, Dewey had an understanding of experience that existed only "on the horizontal plane," without any "deeper level."⁷³ Pollock also writes that, although Dewey has a clear appreciation for the role social institutions play in "the liberation and development of the individual's capacities,"⁷⁴ he is weak on individuals. He remarks, for example, that "metaphysically, his

doctrine of the individual, especially at the human level, is far from adequate,” and further that Dewey “cannot offer us a satisfactory portrait of human personality.”⁷⁵ As in his essays on Emerson and James, Pollock does not suggest here what would constitute an adequate solution. A related criticism, again without offering the right answer, is that Dewey offers an inadequate understanding of our inner lives. As Pollock writes, Dewey “remained impervious to certain inner experiences which yielded intelligible necessities with respect to truth and value.”⁷⁶ Ultimately for Pollock, although Dewey’s work is at times “reminiscent of a religious tradition,” he had a weak understanding of, and appreciation for, Christianity.⁷⁷ Had he “had a first-hand acquaintance with the traditions of Christian thought,” Pollock continues, he would have recognized the Christian emphases on action, on the importance of experience and the concrete, and especially on how “the incarnation mentality, fostered by Christianity, made it entirely inevitable that men should strive to bring truth and value down to earth.”⁷⁸ Thus, Pollock suggests that a more Christian Dewey would have recognized the Christian core of his own pragmatism.

VI

This initial sketch of the thought of Robert Pollock—in the context of John McDermott’s praise of him as a philosopher and pedagogue—would seem to validate the assumption made at the beginning of this paper that Pollock’s work provides us with one of the keys to understanding McDermott.⁷⁹ In particular, none of the positive themes in Pollock that we have considered are alien to McDermott’s thought. Examples of this continuity include: Pollock’s championing of Emerson’s call for experiential wholeness both in our relations to nature and to our fellows; Pollock’s emphasis upon James’s focus on the big problems in existence and his stress upon the role of thought in life; and Pollock’s seconding of Dewey’s call for us to recognize our place in an open and as-yet incomplete universe where pragmatic intelligence can help us to deal with our problems. Unlike these instances of overlap, however, the criticisms

that Pollock offers of the deficiencies he finds in Emerson, James, and Dewey, and especially his suggested revisions, are without parallel in McDermott's thought. Moreover, while Pollock's criticisms remain initially vague, they are less so if we remember his roots in mediaeval thought.

It is thus necessary to consider at some point the indications in Pollock's thought of a fundamental philosophical relationship to Christianity and Catholicism, a relationship that McDermott's work does not share. As we have seen, Pollock did his doctoral studies at the University of Toronto's Institute of Mediaeval Studies, and he taught at Catholic institutions for almost his entire career, including over thirty years at Fordham University. If, as Pollock cautions us, we take seriously his own context, his place within the processive intellectual world (in his case, the world of pre-Vatican II thought), and his own individual and social experience, his perspective becomes clearer.⁸⁰ It may be, of course, that the Catholic nature of Pollock's writings is simply an overlay by a cautious faculty member attempting to mirror the viewpoints of his Catholic superiors. It is more likely, however, that Pollock was attempting to bear witness to his own personal and philosophical values. I have in mind here, for example, the values that underlie his complaints about Emerson's inadequate understanding of evil, James's failure to recognize transcendent truth, and Dewey's blindness to the incarnation mentality. A reader like McDermott—although himself deeply grounded in the complexities of the Catholic perspective during his years of study at Fordham and earlier at St. Francis College in Brooklyn—had rejected the presumed Catholic essence that Pollock found underlying these values, and thus did not stress them in his tributes to Pollock.⁸¹ More positively, McDermott found these values more broadly available than Pollock did.

Perhaps a clearer sense of the seamlessness of the religious and the secular in Pollock's thought that does not appear in McDermott's thought would emerge if we consider another of Pollock's essays, "The Person in American Society," from 1954.⁸² In this essay, Pollock offers a clear (and McDermott-like⁸³) sense of American society as "a great restless, shifting, improvising world ... poised ...

between order and chaos,” and a sense that “apart from society, the person would remain in an abnormal and nondescript state, incapable of rising beyond a fragmentary sentience.”⁸⁴ Moreover, Pollock continues that in this context, the American “became more deliberately and self-consciously a community-builder and, therefore, in the highest degree a maker of history.”⁸⁵ There are, of course, problems in this American past; and Pollock emphasizes in particular that our society had been turned into an “economic structure,” and the “entire pattern of economic activities” had “become a screen through which reality is filtered.”⁸⁶ In consequence, we have lost our sense of community, and “society is being squeezed ... into an economic world whose depersonalizing pressures are badly distorting the human image.”⁸⁷ To repair our situation, Pollock writes that we need to re-integrate the economy “into the total community,”⁸⁸ to carry out “a structural reform of society on the basis of the common good.”⁸⁹

With allowances made for developments over the years, this understanding of the American situation could be attributed to McDermott. Only when we consider the means that would affect the solution that Pollock desires do we find a clear difference between them. Pollock writes that “the Church inaugurated a new phase in human history by calling human personality to the center of the social order in place of the family, caste, race, or any other form of privilege.”⁹⁰ Christianity, he notes further, “gave man a new consciousness of his creative role in relation to the social world.”⁹¹ Especially in America, the “European mentality, nurtured by the Christian drive to transform the ideal into living fact,” met a situation of openness and possibility.⁹² Pollock’s call for deeply religious means to repair our society are in conflict with many other interpretations of our situation, including McDermott’s. For Pollock, however, “the reconciliation of a deeply personal life and a truly cohesive life is inconceivable without a new influx of the Christian spirit,” and “the reconciliation of individualism and collectivism” he views as “a work which belongs in a very special way to the Christian community within society.”⁹³ For McDermott,

on the contrary, the redemptive possibilities of nature and community do not depend on Christian or Catholic assumptions.

I have been considering the influence of Robert Pollock on the philosophic thought of John McDermott. Clearly, in spite of their powerful appreciations of the work of Emerson, James, and Dewey, Pollock and McDermott do not agree on the religious meaning of the American experience. I have not speculated here about the reasons for their divergence; I have simply attempted to display it. Further work, perhaps autobiographical work on McDermott's part, might enable us to understand why he did not fully adopt the positions of Pollock.

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NOTES

I am grateful to Raymond Boisvert of Siena University, Greg Moses of Texas State University, David Hildebrand of the University of Colorado Denver, and William J. Gavin of the University of Southern Maine, for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹ Especially in Campbell and Hart, *Experience as Philosophy*, see 30-57, 275-78.

² For some accounts of his life and work, see McDermott's memorial in the *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* and the *New York Times* obituary.

³ McDermott, "Acknowledgements," in *Writings of William James*, ix.

⁴ McDermott, ix; cf. xv.

⁵ McDermott, "Acknowledgements," in *Basic Writings of Josiah Royce*, ix.

⁶ McDermott, "Preface," in *Philosophy of John Dewey*, xii; cf. xxxiiin28.

⁷ McDermott, "Acknowledgments," in *A Cultural Introduction to Philosophy*, xvi.

⁸ Pollock was the editor of *The Mind of Pius XII* (New York: Crown, 1955) and the author of various essays and reviews. He was also a contributor to a volume by Luigi Sturzo (1871-1959), *Del Metodo Sociologico: Risposta ai Critici* (Bergamo: Edizioni Atlas, 1950).

⁹ Pollock's dissertation was entitled "The Doctrine of Rectitude in St. Anselm," University of Toronto, 1932, 163 pp. (Mills and Dombra, 98).

¹⁰ Retired/fired? Pollock was fired by Fordham at age sixty-five. He later taught at Seton Hall University (1966-).

¹¹ These three essays are: Pollock, "Ralph Waldo Emerson"; Pollock, "James: Pragmatism"; and, Pollock, "Process and Experience."

¹² Pollock, "James: Pragmatism," 187.

¹³ Pollock, 187.

¹⁴ Pollock, 187.

¹⁵ Pollock, 187.

¹⁶ Pollock, 195.

¹⁷ McDermott, "Afterword: You Are Really Able," 249.

¹⁸ Pollock, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," 49.

¹⁹ Pollock, 49.

²⁰ Pollock, 20.

²¹ Pollock, "James: Pragmatism," 188.

²² Pollock, 188.

²³ Pollock, 188.

²⁴ Pollock, 187.

²⁵ Pollock, "Process and Experience," 162.

²⁶ Pollock, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," 18-19.

²⁷ Pollock, 16.

²⁸ Pollock, 23-24.

²⁹ Pollock, 17.

³⁰ Pollock, 38.

³¹ Pollock, 37.

³² Pollock, 34.

³³ Pollock, 41.

³⁴ Pollock, 35.

³⁵ Pollock, 37.

³⁶ Pollock, 36 and 38.

³⁷ Pollock, 28.

³⁸ Pollock, 30.

³⁹ Pollock, 29.

⁴⁰ Pollock, 53.

⁴¹ Pollock, 53.

⁴² Pollock, 53. Pollock's later essay, "Emerson and America's Future," does not contain a Catholic shift but ends with a celebration of latter-day Emersonians in American life: Buckminster Fuller, Louis Sullivan, John Roebling, Frederick Law Olmstead, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Charles Ives. See also "Dream and Nightmare," in which Pollock develops hope and rebirth within the community as his key themes.

⁴³ Pollock, "James: Pragmatism," 189.

⁴⁴ Pollock, 198.

- ⁴⁵ Pollock, 190 and 189.
⁴⁶ Pollock, 191.
⁴⁷ Pollock, 192.
⁴⁸ Pollock, 192.
⁴⁹ Pollock, 194.
⁵⁰ Pollock, 190.
⁵¹ Pollock, 188.
⁵² Pollock, 190 and 197.
⁵³ Pollock, 189.
⁵⁴ Pollock, 189.
⁵⁵ Pollock, 189.
⁵⁶ Pollock, 194.
⁵⁷ Pollock, 189-90, 192.
⁵⁸ Pollock, 190-91.
⁵⁹ Pollock, 193-94.
⁶⁰ Pollock, 198.
⁶¹ Pollock, 193.
⁶² McDermott, *Philosophy of John Dewey*, xii; cf. McDermott, *Drama*, 498n21, 544n72. Pollock's essay also includes a brief excerpt from McDermott's dissertation (Pollock, "Process and Experience," 190).
⁶³ Pollock, "Process and Experience," 190.
⁶⁴ Pollock, 161.
⁶⁵ Pollock, 161.
⁶⁶ Pollock, 165.
⁶⁷ Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 113.
⁶⁸ Pollock, "Process and Experience," 166
⁶⁹ Pollock, 171.
⁷⁰ Pollock, 171.
⁷¹ Pollock, 173.
⁷² Pollock, 179 and 168.
⁷³ Pollock, 176 and 190.
⁷⁴ Pollock, 192.
⁷⁵ Pollock, 182-83.
⁷⁶ Pollock, 185.
⁷⁷ Pollock, 173.
⁷⁸ Pollock, 193.

⁷⁹ Another key to understanding McDermott would be the powerful influence of existentialism. See especially: Gavin, "Locality in American Culture"; Allen, "'Bite' of the 'Existential Moment'"; Lothstein, "No Eros, No Buds,"; and, McDermott, "Afterword: You Are Really Able."

⁸⁰ Pollock's edition of *The Mind of Pius XII* offers an extensive forward and numerous notes.

⁸¹ A good cross-section of Pollock's relevant writing would include: "Catholic Philosophy," "Philosophical Anthropology," "History is a Matrix," and "Freedom and History."

⁸² Pollock, "Person in American Society," 45-60.

⁸³ See, for example, McDermott, "American Angle of Vision," 37-88.

⁸⁴ Pollock, 45-46.

⁸⁵ Pollock, 47.

⁸⁶ Pollock, 49.

⁸⁷ Pollock, 53.

⁸⁸ Pollock, 57.

⁸⁹ Pollock, 59.

⁹⁰ Pollock, 47.

⁹¹ Pollock, 58.

⁹² Pollock, 56.

⁹³ Pollock, 60.

A JAMESEAN PERSONSCAPE:
THE FRINGE AS MESSAGING TO THE 'SICK SOUL'

John J. McDermott
Texas A&M University

*"I believe that no so-called philosophy of religion can begin
to be an adequate translation of what goes on in
the single private [person]."*

—William James,
"The Varieties of Religious Experience"

I

I am not going to present a traditional philosophical paper on the thought of William James. Over the past three decades such commentaries have increased, exponentially, such that his work is no longer circumscribed by wisecracks about the alleged philosophical ineptness of his pragmatism. One thinks here, among others, of the masterful interpretations of James by Gerald Myers in *William James: His Life and Thought* and David Lamberth in *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience*. Certainly one would be hard pressed to write as Margaret Knight did in 1950, in an otherwise cogent treatment of James psychology: "Consequently, though he could never fail to be stimulating, James the philosopher was at best little more than a brilliant and slightly irresponsible

amateur.”¹ I, to the contrary, take William James to have upended two millennia of classical epistemology and metaphysics. Although not heretofore designated as such, I hold that, analogous to Immanuel Kant, in radical empiricism we behold a Copernican moment. It remains to be seen whether David Lamberth is prescient in his contention that James’s metaphysics of experience “is capable theoretically of comprehending the deep, systemic insights into social processes such as those advanced in contemporary studies of gender, race, ethnicity and class, while at the same time correlating them critically to the more intimate religious and moral interest by which we as human beings are animated.”² Of this, however, I am confident: that if spiritual help is needed, whether it be secular or confessional, the writings of William James constitute a deep and nutritious reservoir for us. I read James as a pedagogical enabler, one who helps me to read my experiences, especially those which lurk on the fringe, those had as inarticulate, inchoate, vague, and yet ambient all the while. Plato held philosophy to be *therapeia*, a healing. William James wrote that philosophy bakes no bread, but it does encourage the “habit of always seeking an alternative.” In a spiritual crisis, only an alternative will *work*. Herein, as a variant of religious experience, James marries the wisdom of the noble Jewish tradition of *teshuvah* (repentance or atonement) to the thick terrain of conversion, that is, to speak to myself in a different voice, an alternative, if you will. With Heraclitus, “I searched out myself.”

And thereby—My name is John and I am an alcoholic.

II

My name is John. I was a sick soul. In keeping with the diagnosis of William James, I was a “sick soul”—more, I was an exemplar of his “divided self.” Or, put my way, the ongoing process of my selving was rent by a persistent splitting, a radical interior dislocation—in short, the suffusing of my person with an abominable loneliness.

In the chapter “The Sick Soul,” in his classic work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James introduces us to a raft of persons, from stations high and low, famous and unsung. Each of

these affected persons is riven with a maddening, inner vapor that leaches into every cranny of that person. In the parlance of alcoholism, they were “restless, irritable and discontent.” He cites a priest, Father Gtry: “I neither perceived nor conceived any longer the existence of happiness or perfection. An abstract heaven over a naked rock. Such was my present abode for eternity.” A nineteen-year-old domestic servant commits suicide. She leaves a note telling us that “I am tired of living, so am willing to die ... Life may be sweet to some, but death to me is sweeter.” And James gives us a startling text from Goethe,

“I will say nothing,” writes Goethe in 1824, “against the course of my existence. But at bottom it has been nothing but pain and burden, and I can affirm that during the whole of my 75 years, I have not had four weeks of genuine well-being. It is but the perpetual rolling of a rock that must be raised up again forever.”

This is from the same Goethe whom James cites as a linchpin in his “Sentiment of Rationality” (1879): “The inmost nature of the reality is congenial to powers which you possess.” How these texts live together in Goethe is not for me to say, but they are synchronous in the life and thought of William James. The streaming from the darkness of the sick soul to the effervescence of pragmatism is a testament to the possibility of congeniality and the existence of “powers” to which we have potential access. This stream of experiencing is fed and is unintelligible without the vertebral strand of radically empirical sensibility.

A still further and chilling limning of personal despair is found in James’s discussion, in *Varieties*, of the spiritual diremption of Tolstoy’s inner life. Tolstoy writes, in his *Confession*, that “One can live only so long as one is intoxicated, drunk with life; but when one grows sober one cannot fail to see that it is all a stupid cheat. What is truest about it is that there is nothing even funny or silly in it; it is cruel and stupid, purely and simply.” William James understands Tolstoy to mean that “Life had been enchanting, it was now flat sober, more than sober, dead.” My understanding of this dire situation is that we no longer care for and about the things we care

for and about. For Tolstoy, those who have lived before him, especially the scientists, have found nothing. “And not only this,” Tolstoy writes, “but that they have recognized that the very thing which was leading me to despair—the meaningless absurdity of life—is the only incontestable knowledge accessible to man.” Here, we are at the bottom and James, covertly, in *Varieties*, knows this bottom to have been a dwelling place for him as well.

Perhaps we can glean the full import of the experience of the sick soul if we state it theologically. In a textually legitimate paraphrase of Jonathan Edwards, it would be better for us to be born and damned than not to be born at all. For, by being born, we enhance the glory of God by our dependence on him. Place that over against James’s citation from a patient in a French asylum: “O God! what a misfortune to be born! Born like a mushroom, doubtless between an evening and a morning.”

When I was drifting and then plummeting to my bottom, I would look at the grazing cows with envy. Free of despair, I would say of them. In his remarks on despair as experienced by John Bunyan, James writes: “Envy of the placid beasts seems to be a very widespread affection in this type of sadness.” How did he know that?

III

In Irish, a distinction is made between problem and trouble. The first, even if dire, with work and John Dewey’s “creative intelligence” can be resolved. With trouble, there is no way out, without punishment. The difference between my announcement that I *was* a sick soul and that I *am* an alcoholic is instructive here. In the sick soul, the persons introduced by James are suffering without any quarter. He does not discuss relief until the subsequent chapters on conversion. And the major characteristic of conversion is the appearance, the happening of a power transcendent—from beyond the personal locale of the malaise, the fright, the despair. He holds that the healing of the divided self comes “in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.” He does say that this access to

a higher power is “what conversion signifies in general terms, *whether or not* we believe that a direct divine operation is needed to bring such a moral change about” (my emphasis). Then, in writing of the case of Stephen H. Bradley, he tells us that “possibilities of character lay disposed in a series of layers or shells, of whose existence we have no premonitory knowledge.” One thinks here of James’s contention that there are “possibilities extant” not yet in our present sight.

Returning here to a diagnosis of one kind of sick soul, the clinical low-bottom alcoholic, the received wisdom anoints and judges that person as hopeless, clearly having trouble rather than a problem. Remarkably, in three pages of the Big Book of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, William James, Carl Jung, and Bill Wilson, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), gather together to delineate both the hopelessness and the thin, desperate hope that what we have here can become a problem, with the chance, ever so slight, of having a way out.

A certain American business man had ability, good sense, and high character. For years he had floundered from one sanitarium to another. He had consulted the best known American psychiatrists. Then he had gone to Europe, placing himself in the care of a celebrated physician (the psychiatrist, Dr. Jung) who prescribed for him. Though experience had made him skeptical, he finished his treatment with unusual confidence. His physical and mental condition were unusually good. Above all, he believed he had acquired such a profound knowledge of the inner workings of his mind and its hidden springs that relapse was unthinkable. Nevertheless, he was drunk in a short time. More baffling still, he could give himself no satisfactory explanation for his fall.

So he returned to this doctor, whom he admired, and asked him point-blank why he could not recover. He wished above all things to regain self-control. He seemed quite rational and well-balanced with respect to other problems. Yet he had no control whatever over alcohol. Why was this?

He begged the doctor to tell him the whole truth, and he got it. In the doctor’s judgment he was utterly hopeless; he could never regain his position in society and he would have to place

himself under lock and key or hire a bodyguard if he expected to live long. That was a great physician's opinion...

The doctor said: "You have the mind of a chronic alcoholic. I have never seen one single case recover, where that state of mind existed to the extent that it does in you." Our friend felt as though the gates of hell had closed on him with a clang.

He said to the doctor, "Is there no exception?"

"Yes," replied the doctor, "there is. Exceptions to cases such as yours have been occurring since early times. Here and there, once in a while, alcoholics have had what are called vital spiritual experiences. To me these occurrences are phenomena. They appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements. Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were once the guiding forces of the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them. [Jung takes this from William James.] In fact, I have been trying to produce some such emotional rearrangement within you. With many individuals the methods which I employed are successful, but I have never been successful with an alcoholic of your description."³

The Book then invokes *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James, stressing the many ways in which the alcoholic sick soul can have this "spiritual experience" and discover God. And it is here that we have the origin of the contentious, conflicted presence of the higher power in most recovery literature, especially Alcoholics Anonymous. (Parenthetically, this contention generated the line in Step 3, "God as we understood Him," the *sotto voce*, "a power greater than ourselves," and a further reference to William James's position that the "spiritual experience" could be of the "educational variety.")

Forebodingly, John the alcoholic does not believe in a higher power, nor do many other recovering alcoholics. For many, this is a permanent obstacle to recovery. Consequently, it was assumed that my trouble was indeed irresolute. Not so fast. Returning to James on the sick soul, at the end of the chapter he shares a document detailing a vastation experience laced with extreme morbidity and imagined terror. And the correspondent claims that he would have "grown

really insane” had he not clung to scriptural texts like “The eternal God is my refuge.” We know this document to be autobiographical. We also know that although this event was episodic and not permanently suffusing, James remained depressed for a year subsequent and, on February 1, 1870, tells us that he “about touched bottom.” On April 30, 1870, in a diary entry he announces a turn: “I will go a step further with my will, not only act with it, but believe as well. . . .” This turn does not involve a higher power and yet it was to be the decisive thread that knit together all of James’s work for the next forty years. James’s belief in what he later, famously, calls the “Will to Believe” is a philosophical bootstrap move. But this contention will enable him to set out with the mission that “Life shall [be built in] doing and suffering and creating.”⁴⁴ From that “way” of William James, I took a “way” out of my trouble, from which I was told over and over again, there was no way out. And, along his waying, he introduces me to a series of insights helpful to my waying. To that Jamesian pedagogy, I now turn.

IV

Contrary to conversion experiences of the sick soul, the secular clinical low-bottom alcoholic allegedly has no way out, that is, no cure, no Valhalla, no coming into the clearing, once and for all. The best one can do is remission. The Book tells us that we are offered a daily reprieve. Our sobriety depends on our “fit spiritual condition,” which is a way of saying that we must be vigilant, acutely aware of our vulnerabilities, and must stay in close contact with the community of recovering alcoholics as a “power greater than ourselves.” Quite simply and directly, we must be fed.

A turn is not a spinning top. It needs nutrition. From whence comes that, if I am secular, a philosophical naturalist, one who lives only *sub specie temporis*? As a sick soul of the alcoholic variety, all dangers are heightened. As a student of William James, personal possibilities are vast and enlivened, as when he tells us, in “The Will to Believe” (1897), that “the deepest thing in our nature is this *Binnenleben*, this dumb region of the heart in which we dwell alone

with our willingnesses and unwillingnesses, our faiths and fears.” For practicing alcoholics, “dwelling alone” had no such possibilities, for we faced only “finished facts,” as James would say, all dolorous and threatening. I give you a version from the AA book of an alcoholic sick soul:

For most normal folks, drinking means conviviality, companionship and colorful imagination. It means release from care, boredom and worry. It is joyous intimacy with friends and a feeling that life is good. But not so with us in those last days of heavy drinking. The old pleasures were gone. They were but memories. Never could we recapture the great moments of the past. There was an insistent yearning to enjoy life as we once did and a heartbreaking obsession that some new miracle of control would enable us to do it. There was always one more attempt—and one more failure.

The less people tolerated us, the more we withdrew from society, from life itself. As we became subjects of King Alcohol, shivering denizens of his mad realm, the chilling vapor that is loneliness settled down. It thickened, ever becoming blacker. Some of us sought out sordid places, hoping to find understanding companionship and approval. Momentarily we did—then would come oblivion and the awful awakening to face the hideous Four Horsemen—Terror, Bewilderment, Frustration, Despair. Unhappy drinkers who read this page will understand!

Now and then a serious drinker, being dry at the moment says, “I don’t miss it at all. Feel better. Work better. Having a better time.” As ex-problem drinkers, we smile at such a sally. We know our friend is like a boy whistling in the dark to keep up his spirits. He fools himself. Inwardly he would give anything to take half a dozen drinks and get away with them. He will presently try the old game again, for he isn’t happy about his sobriety. He cannot picture life without alcohol. Some day he will be unable to imagine life either with alcohol or without it. Then he will know loneliness such as few do. He will be at the jumping-off place. He will wish for the end.⁵

And the *end*, he will do, directly by suicide, indirectly by death from alcohol poison, or covertly by alcoholically induced accident. This text, without missing a beat, could have been included among those that James selects for the sick soul. There are hundreds more of these stories, these accounts of “living” at the bottom, a living death so to speak.

As I detailed earlier, we know that James spent time in the darkness. We know, as well, that he announced a turn that was to become a way out for him, namely, a self-propelling act of the will, which he said “to be sure *can’t* be optimistic” but can “posit,” that is, shift the site by which we carry on. Herein, we have the “relocation” of the inner life discussed in the sick soul and the rearrangement he discussed in “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” whereby “our self is riven and its narrow interests fly to pieces, then a new centre and a new perspective must be found.” So too, is this the centerpiece of Jung’s counsel to his hopeless hapless alcoholic patient, namely, the need for “a huge emotional displacement” under the press of a vital spiritual experience. For me, this is the turn called for in the AA Big Book chapter “How It Works”: “We stood at the *turning* point” (my emphasis).

All of this is comparatively well known by students of William James and especially by reflective, long-suffering recovering low-bottom alcoholics. It is also well known that the program of Alcoholics Anonymous provides us with a “way” out of the darkness, subsequent to the turn as made by “our innermost self.” What is less well known, however, is that the philosophical ruminations of occasional contentions in the work of William James are also a way out of the darkness. Further, this way of James does *not* entail the necessity of certitude, the assumption of or the need for ultimate intelligibility. Nor must one have a transcendent source of power to credential either one’s beliefs or one’s actions. Rather, “by their fruits ye shall know them,” and the proof is in the pudding. Not that James rules these desiderata out of court, for pluralist that he is, more than one way of a way is a player. He does, however, hold that none of these finalities is sufficiently grounded,

experientially, and that they all can be, and indeed have been, obstacles to human flourishing.

We have a number of paths to take on the thought of William James that would be salutatory for amelioration of the alcoholic sick soul. We could, for example, track his concern for blindness, which in this situation I do not register as moral blindness but rather as experiential blindness. The correlate here for the alcoholic sick soul is a double denial; the first, that something is awry with me, and the second is my denial by deflection of the messages given to me, both as warnings and for the possibility of help. We could also probe his many writings on the human will, especially his contention that our will can be an actor, a knowing actor, and not simply a carrier of orders from our minds, which for the alcoholic sick soul are relatively deranged. The issue at stake here is that the alcoholic sick soul has no will power, for the grip of addiction strips us of the capacity to act in a traditional manner, that is, changing, stopping, starting fresh. The incontinence of our will as discussed by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, perceptive as that may be, does not face up to the shocking contention of the Big Book, that “self-knowledge avails us nothing.” Self-deception as a metaphor or as a phenomenon does not show up in James, as such. Subtly, however, it is a Jamesian message, for he holds that nothing is so until the consequences show their hand. No practicing alcoholic wants to hear that. Yet, no issue is more paramount in the early stages of recovery, for as we “survey the wreckage of our past,” the AA phrase, we are utterly astonished and chagrined at the harm we have caused and at the looming chasm between our “self-knowledge” and our actions. William James teaches us that if the relationship between knowing and action is characterized by a flaccid will, be that due to madness, despair, or addiction, then we are cut off from possibility, from chance and from recovery. For a practicing alcoholic this is not a welcome lesson, for he or she cannot face the consequences when the upshot of that is to make the turn, *now*.

We could also track James’s voluntarism through his many discussions on the powers and energies of men. At first glance, the significance of these writings for the alcoholic sick soul is

immediate, for the first half of the first step in AA reads, “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol.” James is fascinated with personal energy and with a rending of the nature of willpower. I read these essays as compensatory to his congenital and epigenetic neurasthenic self working here, as well as the behavioral strand in James’s stream. Not only were Freud and Jung his descendents, but so too were John Watson, pioneer of behaviorism, and B. F. Skinner. There is work to be done here, but I choose another path in the writings of William James.

For me, help for the way out by the sick soul, alcoholic or otherwise, is his bequest of radical empiricism, broadly construed, begun at least as early as his essay “On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology” in 1884, continuing through the chapter “The Stream of Thought” in *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890, his remarks in the preface to *The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* in 1897, the essays of 1904–1906, and a final statement in the preface to *The Meaning of Truth*, 1909. Other instances abound.

The irreducible kernel of James’s radical empiricism is, first: we are going to discuss our experiences and only our experiences (as of today, that means under consideration are the experiencings of six billion human beings); second, it is a fact (in the New York City jargon of my childhood—this is true fact), a fact “that relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience” (preface, *The Meaning of Truth*). We have here an equivalently affective experience of “and” and “cold,” of “but” and “hot.” The “generalized conclusion” is that our stream of experience is concatenatedly “knit from within” and does not need an “extraneous trans-empirical connective support,” from any source no matter how benighted. Riding beneath this description of radical empiricism are his assumptions that we are interest-bearing organisms, welcoming, rejecting, and choosing from the interminable eventing that cascades over us, around us, under us, and through us. Crucial, also, is his view that consciousness has a fringe as well as a focus.

This Jamesian personscape provides us with a rich deposit from the making of a philosophical anthropology. Today, I reach for but one fallout, one upshot, one message: can I find help here for the recovering of a sick soul, in particular, the alcoholic sick soul? Yes, indeed!

The experience of despair is a constant presence in James's reportage of the sick soul. Certainly despair is undergone by the low-bottom alcoholic, but the nomenclature is tellingly different, namely, we experience unyielding, systemic loneliness. In the book of AA, "loneliness," "alone," and "lonely" are the most frequent diagnostic words. If you begin an AA meeting with fifteen recovering alcoholics of variant length of sobriety, age, gender, race, class, occupation, profession, whatever, and say, "Let us discuss loneliness," invariably you will witness an outpouring of admission that loneliness was unbearable, a loneliness known "as few do." What does the radical empiricism of William James have to do with our plight? Much! Loneliness is disconnection. I reach but I do not touch. With Heraclitus, the Logos speaks but I do not hear. Febrile texture turns to straw. The world of experience turns shabby and I, myself, become shabby. Contrary to the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (in "God's Grandeur"), there is no "freshness deep down things." There is no freshness, no deep, nowhere, no how. My world is stripped of contours, edges, rivulets, bypasses, signings, and, above all, horizons. I am locked up inside my sick soul, my addiction and I experience the utter hopelessness as earlier expressed by Leo Tolstoy, a Jamesian sick soul.

Entering into the process of recovering—assuming here a turn, a Jamesian willingness, not a conversion—I need to be fed, quick and very slow. The quick "is bringing possibility back into life." James tells us that we experience separateness to the end. Forget about temporal finality. But he also tells us that separateness, disconnection, is a continuous transition. This means that my loneliness, stark and searing as it may be, is continuous with the flow of my experiencing and is potentially open to messages from whomever, whatever, wherever, especially those from the fringe of the speaking stream. To be a sick soul, to be a drunk, an alcoholic,

an addict, a thief cannot be captured by a label. And it cannot be diagnosed as a personal state, a type, an object, a subject, or any other nomination that reflects a “block universe,” a “brickbat plan of construction,” so deplored by William James, in *Principles of Psychology*. To be a sick soul is a process. We are souls who are sickening, such that the spiritual nutrition needed to sustain a turning is blocked, from our seeing, our hearing, our touching, our feeling. We find ourselves in an encapsulating vortex. Spiritual inanition is our lot, our trap.

Yet, all may not be lost. James has counseled us that separateness, loneliness, is a continuous transition. Continuous with what? we ask. With the fringe, with the more, with the “fact” that “there can *be* no difference anywhere that doesn’t *make* a difference elsewhere.” Surely, our explicit situation is dreadful. We must turn to the implicitness both awash and hidden in everything, everywhere. In “A World of Pure Experience” in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, James writes: “Our fields of experience have no more definite boundaries than have our fields of view. Both are fringed forever by a *more* that continuously develops, and that continuously supersedes them as life proceeds.”

William James is not telling us that our abject loneliness should reach out for a “more,” a relational buzz. No. He is telling us that our loneliness has its own “more.” To have this “more,” look to the edge, follow the relational transitions, however spare, however pale. This is the “slow.” More than likely, nutrition, even if ever so slight, will show its hand. He continues:

...Experience itself, taken at large, can grow by its edges. That one moment of it proliferates into the next by transitions which, whether conjunctive or disjunctive, continue the experiential tissue, cannot, I contend, be denied. Life is in the transitions as much as in the terms connected; often, indeed, it seems to be there more emphatically, as if our spurts and sallies forward were the real firing-line of the battle, were like the thin line of flame advancing across the dry autumnal field which the farmer proceeds to burn. In this line we live prospectively as well as retrospectively.

The second promise given to recovering alcoholics is that “we will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.” All of our experiencings speak, not only to us but within the stream itself. And how is that possible? Because, *mirabile dictu*, our experiences are “cognitive of one another,” for the “knowledge of sensible realities thus comes to life inside the tissue of experience.” Loneliness is cut, for we are not spectators looking out at a vast abyss, so characteristic of the sick soul. Rather, we are participants in the “knowledge of sensibilities,” as “*made*; and made by relations that unroll themselves in time.” However halting, sparse, bare, this ongoing relational manifold is at the beginning of recovery; it is nonetheless, a Jamesian “perch” in the rush of sensorial makings and unmakings. Following James, this knowledge is not knowledge “about,” as in the conceptual or formulaic, notably characterized by distance between self and world. Rather, for James we speak here of knowledge by “acquaintance,” by direct experience, prehensive, hand over hand. And our loneliness is further ameliorated by the rush of hunches, hints, and surprises as these relations speak to each other, and slowly, richly, speak to us. Contrary to common wisdom, I do not think that in recovering, the amelioration of systemic loneliness occurs in a flash, a burning bush as it were. Rather, it “works if you work it.” But if James is on to something, as I think he is, then the will to believe in possibility can unlock that “frozen sea” so terrifyingly depicted in his chapter on the sick soul.

I do not speak here about “smelling the roses” (although I can be testy about that oft-cited quick fix for a deadly malaise). No, I point here to pedagogy found initially in the *Periphyseon* of Johannes Scotus Erigena and subsequently in the tradition of the *vestigia dei* as found in the medieval Franciscans, the Victorines, Bonaventure, and on into Jonathan Edwards’s *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, Horace Bushnell, Ralph Waldo Emerson on Nature, and the radically empirical metaphysics and pedagogy of William James. (The capstone of this tradition is found in the first three chapters of John Dewey’s *Art as Experience*.) Only semi-canonical, this tradition embraces a pedagogy of nutrition, one in

which all counts, everything speaks, and although loneliness can never be absolutely abrogated, we become able to connect it to flourishing.

The turn toward recovering is less than an act of faith, but it is more than an act of hope. Absorbing the message of a famous torch song, perhaps we can say that recovering is “taking a chance on love.”

V

I leave you with the following peroration. Twenty-five years ago in 1985, I was drinking heavily, as they say. While in classic denial as to my bonafide practicing alcoholism, I wrote the following paragraphs in an essay, “Experience Grows by Its Edges”:

Being in the world is not a cakewalk. Our surroundings, personal, natural, and social are fraught with potential deception, actual invasion, and an omnipresent indifference. To make a world as distinctively ours by the making of relations is too often a rarity. The other-directedness made famous by David Riesman and his colleagues in *The Lonely Crowd* can be raised to the status of an ontological category. In ideal terms, a person comes to consciousness and begins to work out one’s place, one’s version, and one’s taste for this or that. Yet we now know that the burgeoning self is fraught with personal freight: genetic, familial, linguistic, bodily, climatic, ethnic, gender, racial, and even the subtleties of gait, weight and smile. As I see it, the fundamental challenge is to convert the personal weaknesses into strengths and to drive our strengths into the teeth of a personally neutral but relatively pregnant world. The ancient philosophers, especially the Stoics and the Epicureans, offered sage advice on how to be in the world without getting maced. Taken overall, their warnings focused on the dangers of excess, indolence, and self-aggrandizement. This was and is wise counsel. The intervening 2,000 years, however, have bequeathed a far more sophisticated environment as a setting for the construction of a personal world. The dangers, the traps, and the obstacles are more subtle, more extensive, and more seductive than they were in antiquity.

The scriptural rhetorical question, Lord, what must I do to be saved? can be reinvoked by our children and our students as follows: What shall I do to make a world which is personally mine, although it inheres, coheres, borrows and lends to others who are making a world personally their own? Couched more indirectly, this is the question that our children and our students ask us. The initial response is obvious. Make relations! Build, relate, and then reflect. Reflect, relate, and then build. Seek novelty, leave no stone unturned. Fasten on colors, shapes, textures, sounds, odors, and sights. Above all, never close down. The only acceptable denouement is death. Until then all signs are go, that is, make relations until the maker is unmade. Still, in the making of relations, dangers lurk.⁶

I then detailed the perils which lurk as a threat to our making relations, namely, relation starvation, relation saturation, relation seduction, relation repression, and relation amputation. Four years later, I was locked up in an addiction treatment center because I was suicidal and dying, imminently, of alcohol poisoning. Not only was I unable to make relations, doing, making of any kind was “impossible.” Note that word, impossible. And, I had fallen prey to all of the perils I articulated in the essay. In fact, truth be told, I was a Jamesian very sick soul, living barely, and at that, living only a second-hand life. I was not taken by those messages couched in the bland rhetoric of the higher power, nor was I taken by the suffocating omnipresence of moral and cultural expectations, to straighten up. The first increased my second-handedness and the second seemed to come from egregious moral self-righteousness. Fortunately, I had not forgotten the pedagogy of William James. I clung to his affirmation of the possibility of possibility. After all, did not James tell me that “nothing has been concluded” and that possibilities were extant, not yet in our present sight? And did he not warn me that these messagings from the fringe could not be packaged conceptually, for they will go limp? So, too, did he say that such messagings were averse to clarity, even though they be intelligible and meaningful. William James’s mantra, “ever not quite” but “so,” became my own.

Walt Whitman has it best, in “Song of Myself”:

The press of my foot to the earth springs a hundred affections,
They scorn the best I can do to relate them.

Although at deep odds with each other, these profound messages of Whitman hold together, *en passant*, in a Jamesian radically empirical personscape. On behalf of that *coincidentia oppositorum*, I try to live my life, while recovering from the sickness of my soul.⁷

NOTES

John J. McDermott delivered these words as the William James Lecture on Religious Experience at Harvard Divinity School on May 6, 2010. In archetypal McDermott fashion, he included his phone number with the published version of the lecture, along with an invitation to call him if any of those who read it wanted to have a conversation. It was published in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* vol. 39 (Summer/Autumn 2011). We are grateful to the *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* for granting us permission to reprint it in this issue. While we have formatted the article, we have not altered its contents.

¹ *William James: A Selection from His Writings on Psychology*, edited with a commentary by Margaret Knight (Penguin Books, 1950).

² David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7.

³ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed. (2001), chapter 2, “There Is a Solution,” 26–27. The excerpts from *Alcoholics Anonymous* are reprinted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (“AAWS”). Permission to reprint these excerpts does not mean that AAWS has reviewed or approved the contents of this publication, or that AAWS necessarily agrees with the views expressed herein. A.A. is a program of recovery from alcoholism *only*—use of these excerpts in connection with programs and activities which are patterned after A.A., but which address other problems, or in any other non-A.A. context, does not imply otherwise. [These permissions appeared in the original article.]

⁴ *Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott (University of Chicago Press, 1977 [1967]), xxviii.

⁵ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed. (2001), chapter 11, “A Vision for You,” 151–152.

⁶ “Experience Grows by Its Edges: A Phenomenology of Relations in an American Philosophical Vein,” in John J. McDermott, *Streams of Experience: Reflections on the History and Philosophy of American Culture* (The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 151–152.

⁷ I thank Harvard Divinity School, Dean William Graham, David Lamberth, Karin Grundler-Whitacre, and what only can be a cast of thousands who provided information, arrangements, and solutions. Stellar in this regard is Lori Holter, she of endless patience and good cheer.

Review of *The Routledge Guidebook to James's Principles of Psychology*, by David Leary. New York: Routledge, 2018. 364 pp. US\$26.

In 1878, publisher Henry Holt asked young physiology professor William James to write a brief classroom text on psychology for the American Science Series. James's careful work grew into a "break away from the famous 'Series,'" into what he called his "dropsical mass."¹ The two-volume *Principles of Psychology* was a comprehensive review of the new science of psychology with artful commentary on the human mind and behavior. In a similar way, Routledge enlisted David Leary to write a classroom guidebook to *The Principles* for their Guides to the Great Books series, but the veteran psychologist and student of James has created a thorough evaluation of James's classic text in the contexts of the science and philosophy of his time, and with profiles of the trajectory of James's own development and insightful observations on the book's long shadow, all while maintaining the concision and clarity that make this book suitable for classroom use.²

Readers will meet Leary's clarity at first glance. The book is organized into three sections with concise titles: "Background," "Principles," and "Elaborations." And the chapters within these sections each have paired topics, including "Substance and Style," "Psychology and Philosophy," "Perception and Conception," "Cognition and Emotion," and "Known and Unknown." These clear "bundles of two" also offer a subtle response to debating points in

James scholarship:³ how to understand his openness to diverse, even contrasting, points of view?

James has a reputation for ambivalence when confronting stark choices and for inconsistency in theoretical exposition. Part of this reputation stems from his own indecisiveness, which contributed to his youthful troubles. However, as he matured, he resolved to live “without any *guarantee*,” which allowed him to cultivate what I call his “decisive ambivalence” with eagerness to hear out different perspectives for integration of contrasts.⁴ Part of his reputation for inconsistency also reflects the way he responded to his immediate contexts. He wrote when professional standards in psychology, philosophy, and other fields were just starting to form, and he continued to think with spontaneity despite these trends.⁵

James often wrote with an informal style, drawing upon experiential introspective evidence, with metaphors and personal references, including from his own life. This posture produced mixed feelings among his colleagues. Fellow pioneering psychologist Wilhelm Wundt said, on first reading *The Principles*, “It is literature, it is beautiful, but it is not psychology.”⁶ Other professional psychologists went still further; University of Pennsylvania clinical psychologist Lightner Witmer even called James’s tendency to support informal, practical psychological advice a “national peril.”⁷

Trends in James scholarship have echoed these assessments. For the first half century after his death in 1910, especially as psychology developed rigorous scientific schools of inquiry and as analytic interpretations came to dominate philosophy, James was widely regarded as an adept popularizer, but not a serious theorist. More recently, Richard Gale presents the most blunt account of James’s “divided self” while Charles Taylor declares that James is “our great philosopher of the cusp,” eager to move to the boundaries of disputes while bringing his “wide sympathy” for hearing out disagreements.⁸

The object of James’s inquiries, experience, in all its robust variability, is itself full of inconsistencies, and so, as a messenger of these divergent accounts, he invites such varied interpretations.

James maintained that theories translate experiences into more orderly portraits, less true to the abundant reality, but allowing for better understanding and management of those experiences. He illustrated this in a disarming account of the tangible experience of his audience bringing both their bodies and their minds to one of his lectures. He imagined applause at the end from “joy . . . when it is all over,” when his listeners could simply move physically and then would be “at last free to escape from the sound of the lecturer’s voice,” free to carry its intellectual sparks back to their own thoughts.⁹ With his introspective method in *The Principles*, James remained “close to the descriptive, empirical level,” as Leary points out, which enabled him to punctuate his reports on rigorous scientific research with metaphors and everyday accounts that served to illustrate the lived experience of psychological processes.¹⁰ This allowed for more strategic use of theory, rather than avowed commitment to particular orientations.

Leary is evenhanded on the diverse interpretations of James that have appeared in the wake of his influential work, and he even incorporates them into his narrative. The paired topics in each of Leary’s chapters are not only “for the sake of expository convenience,” but also they suggest his judgment that James’s “thinking was admittedly ‘wobbly’ and ‘inconsistent’ at times,” and yet James’s handling of these often-contrasting pairs shows his urge to understand how these topics are “intimately connected.”¹¹ Leary’s accommodation of different interpretations is most evident in his chapter on “Mind and Body,” whose focus on the question of dualism is so central to understanding *The Principles* and the field of psychology in general that aspects of Leary’s approaches in that chapter also appear throughout his book.

Leary depicts diverse ways of understanding James as “three different stories about mind and body in *The Principles of Psychology*” itself.¹² The first is his “positivist approach,” explicitly dualist, with “parallel descriptions” of “mental phenomena as they are actually experienced” and their “physiological correlates,” while “eschewing” any explanations about the “relations of mind and body.”¹³ The second story, appearing “here and there in the midst of

the first story,... ascribes interaction to the mind and body,” with causal impacts of mental and bodily states on each other, a perspective, Leary points out, that is actually “central... to James’s vision of the human person.”¹⁴ The third story “reduces even further” and even “eliminate[s] the gap ... between mind and body.”¹⁵ Because this non-dualism involved “a revolution in the way of thinking about mind and body,” Leary suggests that James in *The Principles* expresses this “subtext” story cautiously, for “exploring how he could move beyond traditional dualism, and so these subtle expressions of non-dualism” are steps “toward James’s own radical empiricism.”¹⁶ In fact, Leary depicts how the “undifferentiated ‘sciousness’ of which he had spoken tentatively in *Principles*,” served as “his incipient radical empiricism,” with unself-conscious “pure experience” serving as the raw material for both mental and bodily experiences.¹⁷ Leary devotes much of his last chapter to how James would have revised his major psychology text in light of his explicit non-dualism in the theorizing of his last decade.

Leary explains James’s commitment to his positivist story as based on his urge to present a psychology free of metaphysics. This allowed *The Principles* to “circumvent the seemingly endless debates that were preoccupying the empiricists and idealists [and]... the materialists and spiritualists.”¹⁸ For his “mass of descriptive details,” James enlisted, for example, materialist methods and the insights provided by belief in a soul, but, Leary adds, “to make any claims about the ultimate nature of mental states would be going beyond what could be said ‘positively.’”¹⁹ This identification of positivism in James places him in the company of those who showed more enthusiasm for science than he could muster.

James’s position seems closer to naturalism, or experiential empiricism, in that he reckoned so carefully with natural facts as experienced, what he called “the point of view of natural science,” without the filtering effects of theories, even scientific theory.²⁰ Yet he respected investigations motivated by a range of theories, so he readily and pragmatically enlisted the insights of researchers uncovering new features of human mind and behavior. To James,

“theories [served as] instruments, not answers to enigmas,” and in writing about the science of psychology, he used the mental tools of scientists with positivist and materialist inclinations without adopting their views, just as he tapped idealistic and religious ideas with a posture of “more deference than ... adoption.”²¹

Some of the pairs in Leary’s chapter organization are not necessarily contrasts. In “Habit and Thought,” Leary identifies the “neurological foundation of habit-formation”; habits begin with mental choices before bodily reinforcement, and then over time they effectively become bodily thoughts.²² This routinization of thought and mental choices gives habits more “plasticity” than reflexes or instincts, which operate on physiological paths; habits build on those, in “reinforcement of some of these established paths.”²³ In sum, habit is not in contrast with thought but a routinized form of thinking, distinct from more spontaneous thought whose deliberate choices enlist reason in the weighing of options. Turning away from the elegant concision of all Leary’s chapter titles, it is tempting to suggest that this chapter could be called “Routinized and Spontaneous Thought” or “Instinct, Habit, and Thought,” with James “rejecting any sharp separation” among these, while attending to the bodily and mental agency within each, in differing degrees.²⁴ Similarly, Leary also points out that “despite the distinctions he made at times between thought and feeling, or cognition and emotion, James never intended to suggest a sharp division between them.”²⁵ On the contrary, he saw these processes, as Leary recognizes, “always acting together to shape the contours and consequences of our experience.”²⁶

The biographical correlate of the scholarly debate about James’s theoretical inconsistencies is a question about the continuity of his thought. Did he turn toward dualism when producing *The Principles* and then turn away from this orientation in the philosophy of his last years, or was he consistently nondualist throughout his career, with less opposition to dualism than embrace of it as an intellectual tool useful for some purposes, such as with scientific psychology research?²⁷

Leary's magnanimous approach to diverse interpretations is well suited to the pedagogical purposes of a guidebook, but the presentation leads to some consistency issues of its own. For example, Leary suggests that James's first positivist story about mind and body placed his other more "interactionist" stories "on treacherous metaphysical grounds."²⁸ This underplays not only the creative metaphysical grounds within the psychology text but also Leary's own accounts about this creativity, based on what Leary calls James's "obvious ... inclination ... toward interaction."²⁹ In fact, Leary sometimes comes close to endorsing the narrative of James's consistent non-dualism, in describing his "consistent trajectory ... toward complete unification" of mind and body.³⁰ To explain that trajectory, Leary turns not to qualification of the first story but to James's "'complete, unqualified reliance upon *experience*, pure, simple, and all of one piece."³¹ That non-dual "one piece" is indeed a central plank of radical empiricism, as Leary readily and astutely explains.

Leary's thoughtful commentary on James's approach to religion actually suggests a way to resolve the apparent inconsistencies of the three stories. Leary reports that James, in his evaluation of religious experience, "was able to put himself into 'the sectarian scientist's attitude,' but whenever he did so, he heard his 'inward monitor...whispering...'bosh!'"³² Similarly, in James's inquiries about the relation of mind and body, James was also able to put himself into the "scientist's attitude," with an openness to what their research could provide, so even the positivist perspective was useful, but not the last word, or as Leary argues, this perspective for James was "a methodological premise to be used for 'scientific purposes.'"³³ Leary also points out that for James, "a 'strictly positivistic' psychology... would be 'provisional' until it was eventually incorporated, along with the other natural sciences, into an overarching 'Science of all things,' which would be the future 'metaphysics'" of his hopes.³⁴ This approach to science resembles both the pre-modern definition of science as broad learning and James's own 1864 "Program of the Future Science."³⁵ Leary's interpretations of James's psychology in relation to his evolving

philosophy supports the view that James's attention to dualist ideas in *The Principles* was less about philosophical commitment than about endorsement of pragmatic and rhetorical ways to incorporate recent scientific research into his evolving views of psychology.³⁶

The structure of Leary's book is sometimes in tension with his own interpretations. In doing so, he really stays true to his task. This guidebook to James's text is fair to different ways of reading James, even as Leary steadily reveals his own points of view. With this approach to writing about *The Principles*, Leary actually replicates James's own path in writing to summarize and honor the new scientific psychology while punctuating his account with his own views on the complexities of human psychology. Leary's grasp of James and his kinship with his approaches to human psychology run deep.

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NOTES

- ¹ William James to Henry Holt, *Correspondence*, vol. 7 (May 9, 1890): 23-24.
- ² For examples of James's anticipation of later research, see Leary's coverage, 77, 303-04, and 317-31.
- ³ Leary, 311.
- ⁴ William James to Alice Howe Gibbens, *Correspondence*, vol. 4 (June 7, [18]77): 571; Croce, *Young William James Thinking*, 26.
- ⁵ For example, see James, "The Ph.D. Octopus," in *Essays*: 67-74.
- ⁶ Steffens, *Autobiography*, 149-50.
- ⁷ Witmer, "National Peril," 436-38.
- ⁸ See Gale; and also see Taylor, 59. On the history of James's reputation, see Croce, "Reaching Beyond Uncle William," 351-77.
- ⁹ James, "Historical Collation, 'The Dilemma of Determinism,'" in *Will to Believe*, 383.
- ¹⁰ Leary, 28.
- ¹¹ Leary, 311, 287, and 260 (and 261 and 265).

¹² Leary, 53.

¹³ Leary, 53.

¹⁴ Leary, 54.

¹⁵ Leary, 54.

¹⁶ Leary, 54-55.

¹⁷ Leary, 308.

¹⁸ Leary, 39.

¹⁹ Leary, 39.

²⁰ James, *Principles*, vol. 1, 6.

²¹ James, *Pragmatism*, 32, and James to Alice Howe Gibbens, *Correspondence*, vol. 4 (October 9, 1876), 547.

²² Leary, 79.

²³ Leary, 78.

²⁴ Leary, 78.

²⁵ Leary, 147.

²⁶ Leary, 147.

²⁷ I pursue the question of continuity in *Young William James Thinking*, 265-66. Leary maintains that James by 1890 “did not yet have a ... way of thinking ... that allowed him to deal adequately with the intimate connection between ... mind and body” (312), and Leary finds evidence for James’s discontinuity in parts of *The Principles* that are “not as thoroughly radical as in other areas,” for example, in his argument that each conception “is not subject to modification” (324). Leary argues that this seems in sharp contrast with his later theories. However, in *The Principles*, James defines conceptions as “something which our attention ... tore out of the continuum of felt experience”; that is what he calls an (artificially) static conception, and in fact, changes in attention could and generally do also focus on “other parts of the continuum from which it was torn.” James does maintain that each initial conception does not change, but if “two of them are thought ... [in] relation,” a “third conception” may emerge—and this shows change, albeit not a change in the originally selected portion of experience which formed the first conception. Also, even within this section, “Conceptions are Unchangeable,” James readily observes interactions of elements of mind and body: “new conceptions come from new sensation, new movements, [and] new emotions,” as well as from “new acts of attention” (James, *Principles*, 439-42).

²⁸ Leary, 54.

²⁹ Leary, 66.

³⁰ Leary, 70.

³¹ Leary, 71.

³² Leary, 274; James, *Varieties*, 408.

³³ Leary, 307.

³⁴ Leary, 306-07; James, *Briefer Course*, 395 and 399; James, *Principles*, 6.

³⁵ James to Charles Eliot Norton, *Correspondence* 4 (Nov[ember] 14, [1864]): 93-94; and Croce, *Young William James Thinking*, 68, 71-72, 93, 173, 239, and 271-72.

³⁶ John O'Donnell adds the support of social history to this view: James's use of dualist thinking in mid-career was "professionally expedient" (O'Donnell, *Origins of Behaviorism*, 92).

Review of *Young William James Thinking*, by Paul Croce.
Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.
392 pp. US\$54.95.

In his wide-ranging 1995 study of William James's intellectual context, *Science and Religion in the Era of William James*, Vol. 1: *Eclipse of Certainty, 1820-1880*, Paul Croce noted that in James's day, "[s]cientific theories and religious beliefs were becoming less and less reliable road markers toward confident assurance."¹ James, Croce explained, offers an exemplary lens for understanding these cultural trends, for three reasons.

First, his early years span the period of the most intense change of ideas of uncertainty. ... Second, his own background and early life included close contact with some of the major figures and movements in the evolution of uncertainty. He experienced firsthand some of the major temptations, confusions, and traumas of declining certainty of his family teachers and peers. And third, as will even become more apparent in my planned second volume, he not only came to understand the intellectual and cultural place of uncertainty in science and religion, but also devised strategies to cope with it and its difficulties. ... From the raw material of his own life and education, he would construct his own prototype of ways to cope with uncertainty in science and religion.²

With his new book, *Young William James Thinking*, Croce has written his promised second volume, "a companion to the earlier book, with stories and evaluations of the young adult James on his way toward his mature life and thought," revealing significant

historical material that has not seen the light of day for many years, if ever.³ Croce's project is a variation on the theme of James's own early attention to the interaction of material and immaterial aspects of life. This is a work of real scholarship, not a popular treatment: Croce has not put James on a Procrustean bed for the sake of a clean and easily accessible biography. Instead, he gives us the full flavor of James's odyssey as a young man. The reader gets to know him as literally embodying the Jamesian message of a life in full—a philosophy later expressed in James's various writings.

Unlike biographical approaches that follow a strictly chronological scheme, Croce has applied the method of "development biography," a new road in the field of intellectual biography.⁴ The sources—predominantly notes, diary entries, and correspondences—have been arranged in circles focusing on four major themes (see the description below) that Croce argues contributed significantly to the formation of James's ideas for a science that would include something of religious experience rather than denouncing value judgments as irrelevant for a life in full. Croce's book, it should be noted, is addressed to everyone interested in William James. While the average reader will be surprised to discover a philosopher in the making and find comfort in James's struggle with life's challenges, the academic/professional reader familiar with James's published writings and mainstream interpretations will certainly be surprised to see how James's (later) philosophical key terms already take shape in his early notes and how they subtly change in James's basic writings, e.g. the essays in *The Will to Believe*, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and *Pragmatism*.

After a brief opening ("An Invitation"), Croce's introduction ("Almost a Philosopher") offers a general account on James's context. The body of the text is organized around Croce's aforementioned four themes. Chapter 1, "First Embrace of Science," portrays James's study of mainstream, materialist science and culminates in his expedition to Brazil with Agassiz, serving as an antipode to James's first work in the laboratory. Chapter 2, "Between Scientific and Sectarian Medicine," shows James both

studying and using healing practices shaped by scientific naturalism and by alternative healers with an interest in body-mind interactions, and provides extensive insight into the world of Harvard Medical School. Chapter 3, "The Ancient Art of Natural Grace," focuses on James's studies in Germany and his affinity for Greek art and the Stoics: "Their [the ancients] focus on depths of meaning in nature provided a resource for his program of future science, in critique of scientific tendencies to reduce experience to material forces."⁵ Chapter 4, "Crisis and Construction," is an examination of James's developing strategies to cope with the complex tensions "that grew from familial and societal expectations, vocational indecision, frequent ill health, [and] awkwardness with women..."⁶ The book closes with a conclusion called "An Earnestly Inquiring State." Croce's notes are a rich trove of both published and unpublished sources. Brief quotations in the main text have been arranged in the footnotes as chunks, in order to avoid long lists of sources for single-lines. An impressive example of James's artistic skill is his drawing, "The Head of Alexandrina," one of the book's sixteen illustrations.⁷ The bibliography is extensive and first-rate, provoking curiosity and paving the way for further research. A chronology consisting of a careful selection of significant biographical dates is given on the first pages.

In Chapter 3, Croce musters substantial evidence in favor of his main hypothesis that James's vision of a pluralistic universe aims to unify science and religion. Readers are likely not to have previously realized how attracted James was to the worldview of ancient Greek and Stoic thinkers. Croce states that "James was drawn to both the Stoic cosmic picture of Reason in the world and the commanding role for the will in human life."⁸ As Croce explains, "[a]t the core of Stoicism was a belief that everything exists from the power of and in conformity with universal Nature, also named with words that can be translated as Reason, Logos, Destiny, Creative Fire, God, Providence, Soul of the World, or just the All."⁹ Referring to James's diary entries, including his record of visits to Dresden's Zwinger-Museum, Croce provides valuable insight into how James processed what he saw with his own eyes. In comparing plaster casts

of ancient art with the modern examples, Croce writes, James “observed what came naturally to the ancients, and he experimented with ways to reduce the prevalent modern dualistic divide between nature and the transcendent.”¹⁰ An extended treatment of James’s encounter with Charles Renouvier’s philosophy of volition is given in Chapter 4. Here, as in many other cases, Croce brings new material to light and integrates it into his narrative of young James’s thinking, reporting, for example, on James’s doubts regarding Renouvier’s “secular outlook,” and giving evidence for James’s preference for “the more obscure French Catholic mystic Jules Lequier.”¹¹

Although Croce sometimes allows the time frames to overlap, he arranges the material consistently and displays James’s diverse interests and ambivalences in detail. He includes sufficient explanatory asides that provide the reader with relief from young William James’s darker thoughts and conflicting feelings. At times, this challenges the reader’s patience, but the author’s explanatory power is terrific, and his skillful way of organizing the material is impressive, enabling the reader to identify with the many struggles the famous philosopher went through as a young man in the formative periods of his life.

From this reviewer’s point of view, the main argument of Croce’s extraordinary book lies in the ‘while-reading-experience,’ for it confronts the reader with James’s inner life as revealed in unpublished primary sources. It is principally about the formation and transformation of first-hand life experience into philosophical statement, argument, and method. This book does not primarily focus on a readership that takes a distanced look at a philosopher’s life; instead, Croce encourages an immediate encounter with James by both the material he uses and the way of arranging it in four ‘circles.’ Croce’s biographical method thus fully accords with James’s spiritual message: life is not a step-by-step linear process—such as it is normally sketched in biographies—but a display of each person’s own forms in their full fact and concreteness. More pointedly, Croce succeeds in drawing the reader’s attention to the multiplicities and off-shoots of James’s formative period that

eventually find expression in his published writings—often to the perplexity of traditional James scholarship.

Perhaps the last century of James scholarship would have looked different if the “crisis-recovery narrative” had been pursued *along with* an analysis of the posthumous decisions about James’s literary remains taken by his family.¹² For example, only a few James scholars have since called into question the sharp disciplinary line between William and his brother Henry. And since there is still ample material James scholars may use to pursue further inquiry, other results may be possible.¹³ In any event, Croce’s book opens new discussion on the relevance of a philosopher’s private notes. As Croce lets us know right from the beginning, James himself would have rather preferred to keep them private. But the biographer’s license to reveal “the flesh-and-blood people involved” seems to this reviewer justified by the noble intention of reaching a better understanding of James’s mature work.¹⁴ If James had established a philosophical system of abstract ideas—as many of his opponents did—his private thoughts and stories, his personal feelings and reflections would have probably been less important, and even that assumption might be challenged.

In other words, whether Croce’s method of ‘development biography’ works for *any* philosopher might be an open question. In James’s case, however, Croce’s approach is convincing, for James himself propounded a philosophy of the fullest fact and concreteness based on first-hand life experience. Given Croce’s earlier core concept of uncertainty that provides the explanatory framework to understand why James’s own life experience became the backbone of his philosophy, the early notes addressed in *Young William James Thinking* yield valuable insight and have considerable explanatory power.¹⁵

From a historiographical point of view, James’s philosophical contribution fits well with the idea of the American Renaissance: James makes such use of the ancient Greeks’ worldview that the subtitle of *Pragmatism* offers a clue for interpretation: *A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. On these grounds, Croce’s book reinforces one mainstream interpretation of James. Yet Croce’s

book goes even further. By interpreting his results as evidence for James's life project of negotiating between science and religion, he recalls the reader's attention to a long-marginalized scientific discourse. More pointedly: "medical materialism"¹⁶—today's neuroscience—is gaining ground again, blurring James's most important distinction between existential and spiritual judgments. Hence, in bringing up James's contribution to a 'future science,' Croce manages to shed light on a significant current debate.

In sum, Paul Croce's *Young William James Thinking* provides important primary and secondary sources to strengthen the argument that the Stoics offered James a model conception of how to combine nature/science and religion with respect to a 'future science,' and puts an inventive method of biography-writing to the test as a means of concretely setting forth James's approach to philosophical practice as a pluralist affair. As its title promises, Croce's take on James thus arguably comes much closer to James's *thinking* than many other biographies: Not only does he confront the reader with James 'in the making,' he also encourages his readers to rethink philosophy not as a matter of abstract ideas but, as James would have stressed, an encounter with life—a risky leap, indeed.

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NOTES

- ¹ Croce, *Science and Religion*, 226.
- ² Croce, 226.
- ³ Croce, *Young William James Thinking*, 7.
- ⁴ See Croce, "Development Biography."
- ⁵ Croce, *Young William James Thinking*, 171.
- ⁶ Croce, 25.
- ⁷ Croce, 61.
- ⁸ Croce, 166.
- ⁹ Croce, 165.
- ¹⁰ Croce, 180.
- ¹¹ Croce, 228.
- ¹² See Menand, "William James," 3–30.
- ¹³ See Loerzer.
- ¹⁴ See the novelist Rebecca Newberger Goldstein's review of Richardson's *William James*.
- ¹⁵ See Croce, *Science and Religion*.
- ¹⁶ James, *Writings*, 30.

Review of *Experiencing William James: Belief in a Pluralistic World*, by James Campbell. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017.
398 pp. US\$35.

William James's work is widely read for its clear thinking on a breadth of topics and, thus, commonly embraced and utilized by scholars in a variety of fields. Philosophers, psychologists, and theologians alike rightly believe that James is relevant to their respective disciplines. But this raises a problem: James's readers from one academic discipline often fail to situate and understand him within the broader context of his multi-disciplinary writings. A philosopher will know *Pragmatism* as well as *A Pluralistic Universe* and *Radical Empiricism*, but may never have read James's psychological or religious studies; a psychologist will know *The Principles of Psychology* as well as *Psychology: Briefer Course*, but is unlikely to have studied James's philosophical or religious works. A theologian may be very familiar with *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and the title essay of *The Will to Believe*, but may have missed or misused James's other psychological and philosophical writings. Yet this problem is even worse: James was an unusually well-rounded scholar, whereas most contemporary academics are specialists, and thus a guide is needed and useful for those exploring less-familiar territories within James-land.

In *Experiencing William James: Belief in a Pluralistic World*, James Campbell provides such a guide and a corrective to narrow

readings of James. By correlating James's multiple works via common thematic threads, methodologies, and philosophies, he aims to connect and contextualize the full body of James's thinking. The ultimate effect of the book is to provide readers with a new "experience" of William James.

Campbell, Distinguished University Professor in Philosophy at the University of Toledo, is exceedingly well-versed in Jamesian literature and the legacy of Jamesian application and criticism. His doctoral training four decades ago was in large part under the guidance of the giant John J. McDermott, the first president of the William James Society (this journal's publisher), and Campbell himself recently served as president of the William James Society. Further, this book is his third in a four-volume analysis of American pragmatism, a series that also includes Benjamin Franklin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and John Dewey. Thus, Campbell's new book also keeps James in conversation with these other American philosophical thinkers, illuminating areas in which their thinking coalesces or collides. For example, John Dewey is notably present in chapters on "Pragmatism," "Radical Empiricism and Pluralism," and "Ethics and Social Thought," where Campbell demonstrates differences between James's and Dewey's philosophies, including their criticisms of each other, as well as lines of pragmatic thinking common to both.

Campbell's arguments are succinct and cogent, and after Chapter 1 on "Preliminary Considerations," the book's chapters are organized logically according to the principal themes of Jamesian thought: (2) "Psychology and Philosophy," (3) "Rationality and Belief," (4) "Pragmatism," (5) "Radical Empiricism and Pluralism," (6) "Ethics and Social Thought," and (7) "Religion." Campbell's appreciative tone, numerous quotations, and descriptive style allows the voices of both Campbell and James to be heard clearly, creating a poetic and enjoyable reading experience that parallels that of reading James's own body of literature. All chapters follow a topical organization, yet the themes of pragmatism, radical empiricism, and pluralism (as both philosophies and methods) buttress and link each

of the various topics. To provide a feel for his approach, we will comment below on the first and last substantive chapters.

In “Psychology and Philosophy,” Campbell invents new language to reflect James’s unique and innovative perspective. “Regardless of” James’s “shifting academic titles” (i.e., as Professor in anatomy, physiology, psychology, philosophy), Campbell argues that “it is better to consider him a hybrid,” that is, a “psycholopher.”¹ This chapter, thus, opens up a fresh understanding of James’s psychologic-philosophic legacy as well as renews an exploration of his continued influence on contemporary thought. *Experiencing William James* presents an overall vision of William James’s psychological contributions by grounding his thought within his context and with the issues of his own contemporary interlocutors. For example, James engages psychology as a science via a descriptive and physiological approach that locates human patterns of thought and states of consciousness within new scientific understandings of the body, i.e., within the plasticity and neural pathways of the brain. He also incorporates philosophic metaphors, like consciousness as a stream of water or a stalk of bamboo,² and he posits pragmatic evaluations by considering the ramifications of states of consciousness in literature, architecture, social life, and spiritual practices.³ By attending to consciousness and its bodily and embodied conditions, James scientifically grounds a field often obscured in abstraction.

In the final chapter on “Religion,” Campbell outlines central points in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (treating it as a primary text) and traces its connection to James’s other works, including *A Pluralistic Universe*,⁴ *Pragmatism*,⁵ and his collection of essays. Campbell thus highlights James’s pragmatic and radically empirical approach to the study of individual religious experience. Unlike *The Varieties*, Campbell’s chapter on “Religion” does not labor over a legion of examples and lengthy quotations. Instead, the chapter homes in on James’s own conclusions. The work echoes James’s own position in positing religious experience as a viable and necessary area of philosophic inquiry, even though Campbell critiques James’s final conclusions; for example, that James neglects

to consider the negative repercussions of religious beliefs in his determination to defend religious experience and the right to believe. Curiously, however, the chapter does not address the many ways that *The Principles* informed James's approach to studying religious experience in *The Varieties*. Campbell ends "Religion" with a personal reflection, honestly admitting his own potential bias that he may be reading James through a "spiritually myopic" positionality.⁶

The greatest strength of *Experiencing William James* is its milestone correlation of James's variety of topics, methods, and conceptual tools. Although, in our personal histories, many readers initially engaged James through focused/isolated commentaries or reprinted essays on particular Jamesian issues (e.g., "habit," "will"), Campbell effectively engages particular Jamesian ideas in an exploration that coheres with James's overall thinking throughout his myriad works (e.g., habit's constructive role in conserving physical and mental energy and destructive role in maintaining social institutions and the status quo at times when social change is most needed).⁷ James, of course, does not always agree with himself, in large part because he is always sensitive to align his message with the needs of different audiences at different times and located in different social contexts. Campbell's contextualized correlations, similarly, demonstrate sensitivity to James's conflicting allegiances, uncertainties, and creative paradoxes. Thus, Campbell's examination of Jamesian thought advances its integrity, establishes its cohesion for continued scholarship, and translates his ideas to modern sensibilities. For example, Campbell skillfully mines and merges James's thinking on race and class, emphasizing James's progressive thinking in these areas while also exposing his shortcomings.⁸ *Experiencing William James*, in sum, offers an accessible entry into James's religious studies for philosophers and psychologists, into psychology for philosophers and religious studies scholars, and into philosophy for psychologists and scholars of religion. That said, it also is true that Campbell himself stays ever the philosopher, focusing primarily on the philosophical relevance of James's psychology and religious studies.

One area in which the book might perhaps be improved is in the analysis of pluralism, which would benefit from more engagement with today's particular landscape of religious pluralism, interreligious movements, and contemporary varieties of modern psychologies. Campbell wonders in the preface if his work may have a "historical feel," such that James may remain "an exclusively historical figure."⁹ But, in fairness, perhaps that is a different project—religious pluralism experienced today is distinct from James's context, and the relevance of James's ideas, which still pepper all of the contemporary varieties of psychology. Most certainly, the overall work establishes James's continued relevance for current religious and psychological scholarship, as well as both historical and contemporary philosophy, by carefully refuting much of the criticism James's work has received over the years. Nevertheless, the book's subtitle, *Belief in a Pluralistic World*, feels overstated.

In conclusion, Campbell succeeds in correlating James's multiple works via common thematic threads. He does this, in part, by fashioning useful links between James's psychology, pragmatism, pluralism, radical empiricism, and religious studies—emphasizing the importance of dialogue between the allied disciplines. Campbell's work recapitulates James's diverse thinking and synthesizes James's range of topics much more cohesively than James himself ever managed. *Experiencing William James* connects a range of substantive material in a holistic and productive portrait of pragmatism and pluralism. The work's full picture of James's thought is a challenge to the reader to pursue a life of pragmatic responsibility and plurality, and it will likely be generative of further application of James to a variety of fields and topics.

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NOTES

¹ Campbell, *Experiencing William James*, 25.

² Campbell, 44.

³ Campbell, 50.

⁴ Campbell, 267.

⁵ Campbell, 282.

⁶ Campbell, 283.

⁷ Campbell, 215.

⁸ Campbell, 221-224.

⁹ Campbell, x.

RELATED SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS ON JAMES

April 2018 – May 2019



In recognition of the fact that James scholars are publishing articles in other academic journals, the editors believe that it is important to keep our readers informed of the diversity within James scholarship by drawing attention to relevant publications outside of *WJS*. This section of the journal aims to provide articles that address the life, work, and influence of James's thought. If you have recently published a peer-reviewed article on James or have noticed an omission from this list, please contact our Periodicals Editor, James Medd, at periodicals@williamjamesstudies.org and we will include it at the next opportunity.



Aiken, Scott and Michael Hodges. “Expressivism, Moral Judgement, and Disagreement: A Jamesian Program.” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (2018): 628-656. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jspecphil.32.4.0628>

Expressivism, the view that ethical claims are expressions of psychological states, has advantages such as closing the gap between normative claims and motivation and avoiding difficulties posed by the ontological status of values. However, it seems to make substantive moral disagreement impossible. Here, we develop a suggestion from William James as a pragmatist extension of expressivism. If we look at a set of moral claims from the perspective of the maximally comprehensive set of co-possible satisfactions, then a claim can be treated as true if it is part of that set. There then is a practical “fact of the matter” about the members of such a set. This makes the notion of moral truth analogous to pragmatic notions of scientific truth, defined as what will withstand inquiry to its ideal limit, and thereby provides a way for expressivists to make sense of moral disagreement.

Bella, Michela. “‘Gesto’ e identità personale. Per una epistemologia del sé in chiave pragmatista” [Gesture and Personal Identity. Looking at the Epistemology of the Self through a Pragmatic Lens]. *Lebenswelt: Aesthetics and Philosophy of Experience* 13 (2018): 101-112. <https://doi.org/10.13130/2240-9599/11114>

This article aims to show the validity of an actualization of William James’s pragmatist epistemology of psychology for the construction of personal identity. Following Giovanni Maddalena’s theoretical hypothesis of “gesture” as a complete synthetic tool for the acquisition of knowledge, an in-depth analysis of the continuous and dynamic conception of personal identity proposed by James may be helpful today to better develop the emotional-somatic dimension of synthetic reasoning. As far as the epistemology of the Self is concerned,

significant continuities and discontinuities are drawn from James's naturalized integrated conception of personal identity in the light of this new Peirce-inspired interpretation. This attempt is part of a wider project in which recovering the character of psychological and ontological processual continuity in James's epistemology makes a considerable contribution to the development of a comprehensive understanding of mental models, one that avoids to tighten up these models as it happens in most of the contemporary epistemologies of the self.

Boone, Mark J. "Augustine and William James on the Rationality of Faith." *The Heythrop Journal* (2018): 1-12.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.13123>

Augustine and William James both argue that religious faith can be both practical and rational even in the absence of knowledge. Augustine argues that religious faith is trust and that trust is a normal, proper, and even necessary way of believing. Beginning with faith, we then work towards knowledge by means of philosophical contemplation. James' "The Will to Believe" makes pragmatic arguments for the rationality of faith. Although we do not know (yet) whether God exists, faith is a choice between the risk of believing something false and the risk of not believing something true, and in the absence of convincing evidence we may decide for ourselves which risk we prefer. We may be able to experience God in the future and thereby gain knowledge, yet this may be contingent on our willingness to believe. There are key differences, however. Augustine is a Christian with a neo-Platonic bent, James an empiricist defending the religion of your choice. These differences may be less significant than they first appear. After explaining Augustine and then James I draw out the major points of comparison and contrast and suggest a few reasons their insights might be at least partially synthesized.

Bouriau, Christophe. “Fictionalisme théologique versus pragmatisme religieux: Vaihinger ou James?” [Theological Fictionalism versus Religious Pragmatism: Vaihinger or James?]. *ThéoRèmes* 13 (2018).

<https://doi.org/10.4000/theoremes.1901>

This paper is part of a larger philosophical project whose finality is to present the Kantian and Neokantian sources of what is now called “Theological fictionalism”. In particular, it proposes to compare the “as-if religion” of the Neokantian Hans Vaihinger to William James's religious pragmatism, explaining a preference for the second.

Bruhn, Christopher and Sue Yeon Syn. “Pragmatic Thought as a Philosophical Foundation for Collaborate Tagging and the Semantic Web.” *Journal of Documentation* 74, no. 3 (2018): 575-587.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-07-2017-0101>

The purpose of this paper is to use ideas drawn from two founders of American pragmatism, William James and Charles Sanders Peirce, in order to propose a philosophical foundation that supports the value of collaborative tagging and reinforces the structure and goals of the Semantic Web. The study employs a close analysis of key literature by James and Peirce to answer recent calls for a philosophy of the Web and to respond to research in the LIS literature that has assessed the value and limitations of folksonomy. Moreover, pragmatic views are applied to illustrate the relationships among collaborative tagging, linked data, and the Semantic Web. With a philosophical foundation in place, the study highlights the value of the minority tags that fall within the so-called “long tail” of the power law graph, and the importance of granting sufficient time for the full value of folksonomy to be revealed. The discussion goes further to explore how

“collaborative tagging” could evolve into “collaborative knowledge” in the form of linked data. Specifically, Peirce’s triadic architectonic is shown to foster an understanding of the construction of linked data through the functional requirements for bibliographic records entity-relation model and resource description framework triples, and James’s image of the multiverse anticipates the goals Tim Berners-Lee has articulated for the Semantic Web. This study is unique in using Jamesian and Peircean thinking to argue for the value of folksonomy and to suggest implications for the Semantic Web.

Carroll, Jerome. “William James and 18th-Century Anthropology: Holism, Scepticism and the Doctrine of Experience.” *History of the Human Sciences* 31, no. 3 (July 2018): 3-20.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695118764060>

This article discusses the common ground between William James and the tradition of philosophical anthropology. Recent commentators on this overlap have characterised philosophical anthropology as combining science (in particular biology and medicine) and Kantian teleology, for instance in Kant’s seminal definition of anthropology as being concerned with what the human being makes of itself, as distinct from what attributes it is given by nature. This article registers the tension between Kantian thinking, which reckons to ground experience in a priori categories, and William James’s psychology, which begins and ends with experience. It explores overlap between James’s approach and the characteristic holism of 18th-century philosophical anthropology, which centres on the idea of understanding and analysing the human as a whole, and presents the main anthropological elements of James’s position, namely his antipathy to separation, his concerns about the binomial terms of traditional philosophy, his preference for experience over substances, his sense that this holist doctrine of experience

shows a way out of sterile impasses, a preference for description over causation, and scepticism. It then goes on to register the common ground with key ideas in the work of anthropologists from around 1800, along with some references to anthropologists who come in James's wake, in particular Max Scheler and Arnold Gehlen, in order to reconceptualise the connection between James's ideas and the tradition of anthropological thinking in German letters since the late 18th-century, beyond its characterisation as a combination of scientific positivism and teleology.

Charland, Louis C. "William James on Passion and Emotion: Influence of Théodule Ribot." *Emotion Review* (2019): 1-13.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073918821438>

This case study in the history of "passion" and "emotion" is based on the writings of William James. James is famous for his (1884) theory of emotion. However, like his illustrious colleague, Théodule Ribot, he also recognized the importance of "passion" in psychology. That aspect of James's work is underappreciated. Ribot explicitly defends the necessity of including "passion" in psychology. James does not go that far. But he does utilize a very similar concept in connection with the term "passion" and there can be little doubt he considered it scientifically legitimate. Consequently, like Ribot, James must be considered an exception to historical accounts of this period which describe a transition from "passion" to "emotion" in which "passion" plays no part.

Cockayne, Joshua and Jack Warman. "The Will Not to Believe." *Sophia* (2018): 1-13.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-018-0689-y>

Is it permissible to believe that God does not exist if the evidence is inconclusive? In this paper, we give a new argument in support of atheistic belief modelled on William

James's *The Will to Believe*. According to James, if the evidence for a proposition, *p*, is ambiguous, and believing that *p* is a genuine option, then it can be permissible to let your passions decide. Typically, James's argument has been used as a defense of passionately caused theistic belief. However, in the existing literature, little attention has been given to topic of passionately caused atheistic belief. Here, we give much needed attention to the issue of how areligious passions can justify atheistic belief. Following James, we argue that if atheism is a genuine option for an agent, it is permissible to believe that God does not exist based on her hopes, desires, wishes, or whatever passions incline her to disbelieve. After defending the coherence of passionately caused atheism, we go on to suggest why this position is a tenable one for the atheist to adopt.

Croce, Paul. "Challenging His Teacher's Racism: Was Huck William James?" *HuffPost*, December 31, 2017.

<https://www.huffpost.com/entry/challenging-his-teachers-racism-was-huck-william-b-5a490387e4b0d86c803c77a9>

As a science student in 1865-66, William James joined the expedition to Brazil led by Louis Agassiz as an opportunity to test his vocational choice for natural history. With wide public support in the US and Brazil, the Swiss-born professor at Harvard University's Lawrence Scientific School presented his expedition as a chance to disprove Charles Darwin's theory of species development by natural selection, and to demonstrate the inferiority of non-white populations. James soon soured on his teacher's ideas. Through his fieldwork, he accepted the plausibility of Darwinism, and actually admired the Native and African Brazilians that Agassiz disparaged. Like Huck Finn following the evidence of his own immediate experience, despite the racist assumptions around him, James noticed cautiously that "no gentleman of Europe has better manners," and even observed that the multi-racial Brazilians had "not a

bit of our damned anglo saxon brutality and vulgarity.” And James even drew a respectful portrait of Alexandrina, the mixed race local guide hired by the expedition party; in capturing her dignity and intelligence, James offered wordless defiance of the racism all around him.

Croce, Paul. “Waking From the Dream of Total Victory.” *Civil American* 3 (January 19, 2018).

<https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/01/19/waking-from-the-dream-of-total-victory>

While it is important to counter false information with truth, it is at least as important to comprehend why fake news seems plausible to so many people. William James assesses the psychological basis for the elusiveness of the “total fullness of truth,” with ways to sort through the abundance for reaching plausible conclusions. Recognition of the robustness of information and of the psychology of selective attention is not an endorsement of fakery, but a path toward addressing it. In fact, combating fake news only with critique does not address the psychological appeal of the stories at its roots. According to the conventional wisdom of our time, with enough accuracy in the real truth, fakery can be defeated. But in a democracy with a proliferation of diverse minds and plenty of platforms for dissemination, no one truth can easily shut out all the other views and interpretations. Now what? James presents a democratic way to address this challenge of democracy: He suggests ways of understanding, even without endorsement, the sources of different people’s stories, and even the potential to learn new layers of truth from encounter with perspectives that include challenging differences. These paths toward seeing the world through the eyes of others can strengthen democracy.

Croce, Paul J. “William James’s Psychology of Philosophizing: Intellectual Diversity, Selective Attention, and the Sentiments in Our Rationalities.” *The Good Society* 26, no. 2-3 (2017): 323-337. <https://doi.org/10.5325/goodsociety.26.2-3.0323>

American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842–1910) developed a mediating path to understand and cope with intellectual disagreement. This template did not come to him any more easily than it would for anyone dealing with the contemporary challenges of deep cultural and political polarization. Although the compelling contrasts he experienced in his young adulthood, especially the competing commitments of science and religion, initially filled him with indecision and discouragement, he later synthesized the parts of his education into a platform for comprehending intellectual differences in relation to each other. James’s approach to intellectual differences can be summarized with “three Rs”: the psychological *roots* of intellectual differences, their *relations* to each other, and effective ways to *respond* to them. James's ideas offer an education in strategies for coping with disagreement based on understanding how differences emerge to encourage searching for bridges across diversity.

Kime, Katie Givens and John R. Snarey. “A Jamesian Response to Reductionism in Neuropsychology of Religious Experience.” *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 40, no. 2-3 (2018): 307-325.

<https://doi.org/10.1163/15736121-12341357>

The neuroscience revolution has revived interpretations of religious experiences as wholly dependent on biological conditions. William James cautioned against allowing such neurological reductionism to overwhelm other useful perspectives. Contemporary psychologists of religion have raised similar cautions, but have failed to engage James as a full conversation partner. In this article, we present a contemporary, applied version of James's perspective. We

clarify the problem by reviewing specific James-like contemporary concerns about reductionism in the neuropsychological study of religion. Then, most centrally, we employ three of James's conceptual tools – pragmatism, pluralism, and radical empiricism – to moderate contemporary reductionism. Finally, we point to a constructive approach through which neuroscientists might collaborate with scholars in the humanities and psychosocial sciences, which is consistent with our conclusion that it is often no longer fruitful to separate neurobiological studies from studies that are psychosocial or sociocultural.

Kirkland, Karl. “The Influence of William James on the Spirituality of Alcoholics’ Anonymous.” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (2018): 1-9.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167818782522>

This article challenges Bevacqua and Hoffman’s (2010) seminal article in this journal on the degree to which Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) falls short in its attempt to download the complete spirituality of William James into the AA canon. Results of the analysis of this question reveal that AA has fully incorporated the depth of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1985). When application of James’s pragmatic method is applied to AA, the organization emerges as complete, with the abundant fruit of almost 2 million members worldwide. AA practices are not exclusivist, and do not offer a “one size fits all” restrictive paradigm. Rather, inspired by James, AA consistently gives explicit permission to members to find a path of their own construction that develops into an inclusive paradigm that has a lifelong trajectory.

LaMothe, Ryan. "Writing Towards Death: William James and Sigmund Freud and Sustaining Objects/Practices." *Pastoral Psychology* (2019): 1-15.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-019-00872-7>

This article addresses how the practice of writing for William James and Sigmund Freud served as a sustaining object/practice and a testament of faith when they faced illness and death. More particularly, their practice of writing reveals not only their attitudes and beliefs about death and life but also the core ideas in which they put their trust and their fidelity.

Lekan, Todd. "Who Are Moral Philosophers? Ethics William James Style." *The Pluralist* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 81-96.

<https://doi.org/10.5406/pluralist.13.1.0081>

The paper argues that although William James is successful in demonstrating the folly of traditional moral philosophy's preoccupation with proving other-regarding moral obligations to an egoist skeptic, his meta-ethical argument for inclusivity seems vulnerable to skeptical doubts raised by Aiken/Talisse's (2011) intolerant fundamentalist. I argue that an explication of the concrete experiential starting point of James' moral philosophy puts to rest these doubts. This standpoint includes James' relational account of the self, which stresses identity formation via the capacity to sympathetically apprehend the point of view of others, and James' phenomenological exploration, in the essay "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," to the experience of overcoming blindness to others' alien ideals.

Matos, Mario Sérgio Coutinho and Marcus Vinicius Cunha. "Conversas de William James com professores e estudantes: lições para a atualidade" [William James Talks with Teachers and Students: Lessons for the Present]. *Perspectiva* 36, no. 3 (2018): 961-977.

<https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-795X.2018v36n3p961>

This article analyzes the educational conceptions of William James in the book *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, published in 1899, in which the notion of teaching as art is found. In order to broaden the understanding of this notion, we refer to the reflections made by James in the book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, published in 1902. The purpose of this article is to revitalize James' conceptions in order to contribute to authors who critically discuss current trends in education.

Meierdiercks, M. Laurel-Leigh and John Robert Snarey. "James, William and the Religious Phenomenology of Religious Experience." In *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, 3rd Edition edited by David A. Leeming. New York and Berlin: Springer, 2018.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-6086-2>

This article demonstrates William James' place in the wider narrative of the phenomenology of religious experience and ultimately how his connection to Edmund Husserl can shed light on what James' work can offer to current scholarship. James made vital contributions to the development of phenomenology and is a valuable resource for those looking to perform a phenomenology of religious experience. First, the article traces how James influenced Husserl by examining both the historical and methodological links between the two thinkers, making use of Husserl's notes, some of which credit James with helping Husserl to develop specific aspects of his thought. Then selected ideas central to James's phenomenological approach are described. These notes on James's understanding of phenomena, intentionality, essences, and his early versions of the epoché and eidetic reduction, plot a clear picture of James's importance in the development of phenomenological thought. These elements come together in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* to portray a budding phenomenology of religious experience.

One does not necessarily need to claim that James is a phenomenologist, only that his work influenced Husserl's formation of phenomenology and that James's unfinished work contains the beginnings of phenomenological inquiry, particularly into religious experiences. Acknowledging his role in the development of phenomenology and the phenomenological nature of his work can lead us to re-examine *The Varieties of Religious Experience* as an early example of a phenomenology of religious experience.

Mollard, Romain. "Les sirènes de l'absolu: William James et Josiah Royce en perspective" [The Sirens of the Absolute: William James and Josiah Royce in Perspective]. *ThéoRèmes* 13 (2018).

<https://doi.org/10.4000/theoremes.1975>

The question of a pragmatist justification of religious beliefs appeared in James's writing in 1898, as an alternative to Royce's theory of the absolute. This pragmatist justification was repeated in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902 but it failed to give a proper account of the truth of religious beliefs based on private religious experiences and ultimately failed to answer Royce's arguments. James knows that any possible pragmatist justification of religious belief based on the practical consequences of religious belief must be completed by a metaphysical theory of the non-natural causality of religious experiences. But that would require going beyond the dualistic and naturalistic account of the *Varieties*. Nevertheless, the difficulties of the monistic theories of the *Essays in Radical Empiricism* pushed James to defend, in *A Pluralistic Universe*, a pantheistic theory in which the Absolute is accepted as a logical possibility, which in turn supposes to accept the composition theory of consciousness that he had rejected in *The Principle of Psychology*. Therefore, James's final theory isn't very different to Royce's theory,

since Royce's theory is not a theory of the necessity of the Absolute but rather a theory of its possibility.

Simonton, Dean Keith. "Creative Genius as Casual Agent in History: William James's 1880 Theory Revisited and Revitalized." *Review of General Psychology* 22, no. 4 (2018): 406-421.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000165>

Near the onset of his illustrious career, the psychologist William James proposed a theory of how individual genius can exert a unique and enduring causal impact on the history of civilization. After first attacking the prevailing view that sociocultural determinism rendered individual creators and leaders mere epiphenomena, James argued that the causal effect of the genius paralleled that of the spontaneous variation or mutation in the theory of evolution by natural selection. Although his specific arguments suffer severe problems even from the standpoint of his own theory, current psychological research on creativity and genius indicate how his basic thesis can be revised and updated with respect to creative genius. This revision and updating concentrates specifically on what is known about the behavioral productivity, thinking processes and procedures, personality characteristics, and early developmental experiences in highly creative individuals. These modern enhancements then lead to the integrated discussion of Jamesian free will and the causal agency of the creative genius. The net result is a revitalized theory of how it even becomes possible for single individuals to make creative choices that not only may cause changes in their own lives, but also alter the course of world history.

Stepanenko, Walter Scott. “Jamesian Finite Theism and the Problems of Suffering.” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10, no. 4 (2018): 1-25.

<https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v10i4.1966>

William James advocated a form of finite theism, motivated by epistemological and moral concerns with scholastic theism and pantheism. In this article, I elaborate James’s case for finite theism and his strategy for dealing with these concerns, which I dub the problems of suffering. I contend that James is at the very least implicitly aware that the problem of suffering is not so much one generic problem but a family of related problems. I argue that one of James’s great contributions to philosophical theism is his advocacy for the view that adequate theistic philosophizing is not so much about cracking this family of problems, but finding a version of the problem to embrace.

Tan, Tobias. “William James and Embodied Religious Belief.” *Contemporary Pragmatism* 15, no. 3 (2018): 366-386.

<https://doi.org/10.1163/18758185-01503006>

Scholars have recently identified resemblances between pragmatist thought and contemporary trends in cognitive science in the area of 'embodied cognition' or '4E cognition.' In this article I explore these resemblances in the account of religious belief provided by the classical pragmatist philosopher William James. Although James's psychology does not always parallel the commitments of embodied cognition, his insights concerning the role of emotion and socio-cultural context in shaping religious belief, as well as the action-oriented nature of such beliefs, resonate with embodied and embedded accounts of religious belief. James's insights are readily extended in light of contemporary embodied cognition research to highlight the interdependency between religious belief of individuals and the cognitive scaffolding provided by embodied religious practices.

Télez Maqueo, David. “Es el esfuerzo una característica esencial de la voluntad? Una aproximación a William James desde la psicología de Tomás de Aquino” [Is the Effort an Essential Feature of the Will? An Approach to William James from Thomas Aquinas's Psychology]. *Veritas: Journal of Philosophy & Theology* 40 (August 2018): 29-47.

<https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-92732018000200029>

William James puts forth the feeling of effort as an essential feature of the will in such a way that its presence would be an undeniable sign of a voluntary act, and its absence proves that the will is missing. This historically accepted consideration has contributed to the prevailing assumption that the power of will depends on the more or less effort to execute an act: the more effort one puts into operation, the more will one have. The purpose of this article is to show a consideration of the will according to these terms disagree with Thomas Aquinas's vision, who teaches that there are voluntary actions that don't take hard work. As a result of the Aquinian stance, the common belief that the most valuable actions are the most difficult, ends up being disputable.

Thoilliez, Bianca. “Fitting Religious Life into the Life of Schools. James and Rorty in Conversation.” *Ethics and Education* 14, no. 2: 157-170.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2019.1587681>

The article investigates which epistemological considerations justify how religious life fits into the school life, and examines the debate on the participation of religiosity in the education system. I do this, first, by addressing the pedagogical implications of the distinction between public and private as maintained by Richard Rorty and, second, by reconsidering the pluralist metaphysics held by William James as an alternative path to understanding and re-addressing the question of religious life in school life. The article analyzes how the strict separation of projects of individual self-creation and the public

sphere, as defended by Rorty, poses problems in implementing pluralism in democratic societies and their educational institutions.

Weinfeld, David. "Les Intellectuals in America: William James, the Dreyfus Affair, and the Development of the Pragmatist Intellectual." *The Journal of American History* 105, no. 1 (June 2018): 19-44.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jay006>

The Dreyfus Affair in France gave birth to the modern intellectual. Emile Zola and fellow free-thinkers defended the wrongly-accused Jewish military captain Alfred Dreyfus from charges of treason. Derided by conservatives as "les intellectuels," the Dreyfusards employed the label as a banner for believers in universal values of truth and justice. In 1907, William James brought the term "intellectual" to the United States. James' version of the intellectual, however, differed considerably from Zola's. This paper looks at James' reaction to the Dreyfus Affair, specifically his conscious or unconscious misinterpretation of Emile Zola's epistemology. This misinterpretation led him to delineate two notions of the intellectual with divergent philosophical outlooks: the former more absolutist, universalist, positivist and communalist, the latter more individualist, pluralist, pragmatist, and cosmopolitan. The paper also incorporates James' brother Henry's reaction to the Dreyfus Affair, to paint a fuller picture of this Jamesian contrast between the European and American intellectual traditions.