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WILLIAM JAMES ON MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND ITS REGULATIVE IDEALS

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2018 WILLIAM JAMES SOCIETY
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS



James's "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" sheds light not only on his views on ethics but also on his general approach to objectivity. Indeed, the paper is most interesting not for the ethical theory it defends but for its general openness to the possibility of our ethical claims lacking objective truth conditions at all. James will turn out to have a very demanding account of what it would take to construct something like objective ethical norms out of more naturalistically respectable material such as our evaluative practices, but in doing so, he also faces up to the possibility that this objectivity is something we may fail to achieve. This comparatively pessimistic prospect in turn explains his surprising pivot toward the divine at the end of the "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" (MPML). James's appeal to the divine is characteristically idiosyncratic, however, and this paper will attempt to explain how it fits in with the more generally naturalistic framework that dominates the rest of the paper.



William James was a phenomenally successful public speaker. He consistently drew large crowds, and those crowds were appreciative enough that when he gave a series of lectures, the size of the audience often increased as the series progressed.¹ Still, he was not immune to having a presentation fall flat, and perhaps his most well-known public misfire was his delivery of “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” (hereafter “MPML”)² to the Yale Philosophical Club in February of 1891. He wrote the next week to his brother Henry:

I gave the address last Monday to an audience of about a hundred, absolutely mute. Professor Ladd, who was my host, did not by a single syllable elude the to the address after it was delivered, either on our walk home or the following morning. Apparently it was unmentionable.³

In spite of its initial reception, MPML is an incredibly rich, if occasionally frustrating, paper that sheds light not only on James’s views on ethics but also on his general approach to objectivity. Indeed, it will be argued here that the paper is most interesting not for the ethical theory it defends but for its general openness to what I’ll here call “semantic fallibilism” in the ethical realm. The fallibilism here is “semantic,” rather than merely “epistemic,” because it relates to whether we may be mistaken not only about whether our claims are true but also about whether they have objective truth conditions at all.⁴

One the most important themes in James’s writing (and life) is the problem of finding a place for value in a world that seems increasingly to demand a purely naturalistic understanding, and for most of us this problem has always been the most salient with *ethical* values. James will turn out to have a very demanding account of what it would take to construct something like objective ethical norms out of more naturalistically respectable material such as our evaluative practices, but in doing so he also faces up to the possibility that this objectivity is something we may fail to achieve. This comparatively pessimistic prospect in turn explains his surprising pivot toward the divine at the end of the paper. This

ultimate appeal to the divine can seem hard to reconcile with the more naturalistic approach that dominates most of MPML, but James's appeal to the divine is characteristically idiosyncratic, and the following will attempt to explain how these naturalistic and theistic aspects of James's paper mesh together.

MORAL OBJECTIVITY AND THE METAPHYSICAL QUESTION

The problem of the objectivity of our moral claims relates most centrally to that part of ethics which James characterizes as focusing on "the metaphysical question." This question "asks what the very *meaning* of the words 'good,' 'ill,' and 'obligation' are" and is as much "metaphysical" as "semantic" since James takes it primarily to be an analysis of the potential truth-makers of our moral claims.⁵ The metaphysical question will be our primary focus here, though the other two questions of ethics, the psychological question (which "asks after the historical *origin* of our moral ideas and judgments"), and the casuistic question (which "asks what is the *measure* of the various goods and ills which men recognize"), will come up when needed to shed light on James's answer to the metaphysical one.⁶

James starts his investigation into the metaphysical question with the assumption that moral terms "can have no application or relevancy in a world in which no sentient life exists," since:

Goodness, badness, and obligation must be *realized* somewhere in order really to exist; and the first step in Ethical Philosophy is to see that no merely inorganic "nature of things" can realize them. Neither moral relations nor the moral law can swing *in vacuo*. Their only habitat can be a mind which feels them; and no world composed of merely physical facts can possibly be a world to which ethical propositions apply.⁷

Once he rejects the possibility of free-floating ethical facts, James needs another way to ground value, and he thinks we can do this by understanding values as dependent upon our practice of valuing. As he puts it:

we see not only that without a claim actually made by some concrete person there can be no obligation, but that there is some

obligation wherever there is a claim. Claim and obligation are, in other words, coextensive terms; they cover each other exactly. . . . [E]very *de facto* claim creates in so far forth an obligation.⁸

James plays notoriously free and easy with what is doing the constitutive work here. In the passage above, and in a number of others, he speaks of our “claims,” but he also writes (often on the same page) of our “desires,” “demands,” “ideals,” and our “likes and dislikes” as doing this work as well.⁹ Still, all of these states have a “world-to-mind” direction of fit, and it is this direction of fit itself, rather than its particular manifestation, that most interests James.

Everything demanded is thus at least *prima facie* good, but the question remains of how, given that demands often conflict, we can get an objective sense of what is good all things considered. This project would be comparatively manageable if there was just one demander, since a single, completely isolated individual could produce objective values simply by finding an equilibrium involving their own demands. As James puts it:

The moment one sentient being, however, is made part of the universe, there is a chance for goods and evils really to exist. Moral relations now have their *status*, in that being’s consciousness. So far as he feels anything to be good, he *makes* it good. It *is* good, for him; and being good for him, is absolutely good, for he is the sole creator of values in that universe, and outside of his opinion things have no moral character at all. . . . Let us call the supposed universe which he inhabits a *moral solitude*. In such a moral solitude it is clear that there can be no outward obligation, and that the only trouble the God-like thinker is likely to have will be over the consistency of his own several ideals with each other. . . . Into whatever equilibrium he may settle, though, and however he may straighten out his system, it will be a right system; for beyond the facts of his own subjectivity, there is nothing moral in the world.¹⁰

For the moral solitude, then, values can be understood as objective in terms of their being part of the optimal set that comes from bringing all of their demands into equilibrium.¹¹ The question

becomes, then, how this model of the solitary demander can be made to apply more broadly.

In particular, it is hard to see how this simple account of objectivity can be preserved when we move from the moral solitude to a situation with multiple demanders. James notes that “the ethical situation becomes much more complex” when even a second demander is added, but this seriously understates the problems that come up when his model is extended.¹² When the moral solitude sees a conflict among their demands, they will naturally endorse the pruning of demands needed to produce consistency, since they are, after all, the one doing the pruning. However, when you have a pair of demanders with conflicting demands, such a happy resolution is harder to achieve, since each would often be happiest if their demands were satisfied at the expense of the other’s.

Still, it is not *impossible* for a pair to achieve the sort of harmony that the moral solitude is able to achieve, and James describes such a pair as follows:

Were all other things, gods and men and starry heavens blotted out from this solar system, and were there left but one rock with two loving souls upon it, that rock would have as thoroughly moral a constitution as any possible world which the eternities and immensities can harbor . . . while they lived, there would be real good things and real bad things in the universe, there would be obligations, claims, and expectations; obediences, refusals, and disappointments; compunctions and longings for harmony to come again, and inward peace of conscience when it was restored; there would, in short, be a moral life, whose active energy would have no limit but the intensity of interest in each other with which the hero and heroine might be endowed.¹³

It is not insignificant that James describes the pair of souls here as “loving” since it is in precisely such loving relationships that multiple people can reach the sort of equilibrium more readily available to the solitary thinker. We may happily give up our immediate preferences in the face of the demands of those we love, and we can demand something ourselves solely because we find it demanded by our beloved. The sort of compromise made by the

loving pair is fully endorsed by each of the two and thus doesn't *feel* like a compromise at all. If a stranger and I need to share a single piece of pie, we may agree to split it, while both wishing we could have the entire thing, but a pair of loving souls (while they still might wish that the pie was larger) will more fully endorse the split, since neither would be happy if the other was left wanting. The fact that they *identify* with each other's desires (as when we identify our own happiness with that of our spouse or child) produces a more substantial sort of harmony.

META-ETHICAL FALLIBILISM AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL QUESTION

Of course, the sort of loving relationship described above idealizes considerably the status of most romantic couples and family arrangements, and this model becomes even harder to extend when we expand the circle to include our friends, our city, our country, and ultimately, all of humanity.¹⁴ Indeed, it is often understated, not the least by James, just how pessimistic this meta-ethical picture is.

James's picture of truth here is essentially Peircian, with ethical truth tied to the coherence and convergence of all our demands onto a single coherent set, but it lacks the metaphysical backstop that Peirce put in play (at least for what he considered to be science). Remember that in "The Fixation of Belief," Peirce took the "fundamental hypothesis" of the "Method of Science" to be:

There are Real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them; those Reals affect our senses according to regular laws, and, though our sensations are as different as are our relations to the objects, yet, by taking advantage of the laws of perception, we can ascertain by reasoning how things really and truly are; and any man, if he have sufficient experience and he reason enough about it, will be led to the one True conclusion.¹⁵

This is a plausible enough assumption to make for our perceptual judgments about tables and chairs, and perhaps it is for atoms and gravitational waves as well, but it isn't clear that it has as much

plausibility when it comes to all of our demands converging on a single ethical reality.¹⁶ This is not, of course, to say that James simply rules this out, but his rejection of the superstitious view that there are free-floating ethical values eliminates the most obvious way to understand our ethical claims as responsive to independent facts in a way similar to the fashion in which our perceptual claims are responsive to tables and chairs.¹⁷

Further, his answer to the psychological question (and his denial that there is any single independent faculty of conscience) also makes things harder for any naturalistic model of how we, much less our demands, could track a single ethical reality.¹⁸ For instance, many in James's time argued that our demands (or at least those that we describe as ethical) were ultimately tracking some single naturalistically specifiable property, and that "moral judgments have gradually resulted from the teaching of the environment."¹⁹ For some, this reality may have promoted the survival of our species, or for others, may have promoted the happiness of our community, but in both cases, there was a single type of reality that moral experience was tracking. If that were the case, then we might hope to find something similar to the Peircian connection between "external objects" and the "laws of perception." By contrast, James takes our demands to have a much less predictable and systematic origin. His discussion of the psychological question has a largely negative take-home message: Moral sentiments are often "brain-born" preferences coming through the "back door" of accidental variations, rather than conclusions coming through the "front door" of personal, or even species-level, experience.²⁰

[A]part from the instinctive preferences and repugnances which are necessary to life, there must be others arising spontaneously or by "accidental variation" in minds which contain these. I firmly believe that we have preferences inexplicable by utility, or by the direct influence of the environment, preferences for certain kinds of behavior, as consistency, veracity, justice, nobility, dignity, purity etc etc.²¹

Take the love of drunkenness; take bashfulness, the terror of high

places, the tendency to sea-sickness, to faint at the sight of blood, the susceptibility to musical sounds; take the emotion of the comical, the passion for poetry, for mathematics, or for metaphysics, no one of these things can be wholly explained by either association or utility. They *go with* other things that can be so explained, no doubt; and some of them are prophetic of future utilities, since there is nothing in us for which some use may not be found. But their origin is in incidental complications to our cerebral structure, a structure whose original features arose with no reference to the perception of such discords and harmonies as these. . . . a vast number of our moral perceptions are certainly of this secondary and brain-born kind. They with deal directly felt fitness between things, and often fly in the teeth of all the prepossessions of habit and presumptions of utility.²²

This does not, in itself, undercut the validity of such sentiments, but if our various ideals “have no common character apart from the fact that they are ideals,” that does give us reason to worry that they may not easily lend themselves to systematization.²³

Furthermore, the sources of our demands may not only fail to be unified, but their mix may vary significantly from person to person. As James stresses in papers like “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings” and “What Makes Life Significant,” the *types* of demands we feel are not uniform among demanders.²⁴ Conflict comes not only because we all want more of some commonly recognized set of goods, but also because we can disagree about what the goods are in the first place. If we really do start with a disunited plurality of demands that don’t derive from a common source, finding a way to harmonize them may be an impossible task.²⁵

THE MORAL PHILOSOPHER AND THEIR REGULATIVE IDEALS

At this point we should turn to a character who represents one of the most interesting argumentative strategies of James’s paper, but who has thus far remained in the background: the moral philosopher. By speaking of the moral philosopher instead of directly about ethics, James distances himself from some of the commitments he associates with the moral philosopher, and this distancing is not

insignificant. The commitments James attributes to the moral philosopher are commitments that he likely would have serious reservations about. The most obvious of these commitments relates to the unlikelihood of our arriving at a systematic and harmonious resolution of all our disparate demands, and thus (given James's answer to the metaphysical question) there being any objective ethical truths at all. To be a moral philosopher is to disavow any skepticism in this area and to demand that there must be *some* proper ordering of these conflicting ideals.²⁶

Multiply the thinkers into a pluralism, and we find realized for us in the ethical sphere something like that world which the antique skeptics conceived of, in which individual minds are the measures of all and in which no one "objective" truth, but only a multitude of "subjective" opinions, can be found.

But this is the kind of world with which the philosopher . . . will not put up. Among the various ideals represented, there must be, he thinks, some which have the more truth or authority, and to these the others *ought* to yield, so that system and subordination may reign.²⁷

[T]he philosopher, just because he is a philosopher, adds his own particular ideal to the confusion . . . and insists that over all these individual opinions there is a *system of truth* which he can discover if he only takes sufficient pains.²⁸

To be a moral philosopher one must assume that absolute truth is available in the domain of ethics, and so the regulative ideals and the Peircian hopes for inquiry (namely that it will always converge on a stable determinate answer) are extended to the ethical.

One might think the demand for consistency and objectivity (and the regulative ideals they represent) is not unique to the moral philosopher and that these commitments are presupposed by all of us who make moral judgements that we take to be true. However, for the moral philosopher, this commitment to organizing all other demands into a "system of truth" is their *only* demand, and it thus has considerable sway with them.²⁹ The rest of us, on the other hand,

have other demands, and sometimes these other demands will trump any drive toward having a consistent set. The non-philosopher's commitment to endorsing the general principle that people should give their excess income to charity may be in some sort of tension with their desire to go on a Caribbean holiday, but their attachment to those individual commitments may be stronger than their commitment to consistency. Further, while they might like for there to be a consistent set of demands across society, this primarily involves society bringing its demands into line with their own, and they may have little taste for changing their own demands just to promote social consistency. Harmonizing everyone's demands into one system of truth would be nice, but if it means they don't get what they want (or they see some of their own ideals discarded), they may be willing to go without it. When push comes to shove, most people will prefer their particular ideals over the possibility of some other set of ideals being universally shared.

Nevertheless, while this all makes the moral philosopher's project hard, James doesn't give up on it. However, before we get to how James tries to give some hope to the moral philosopher's project, we need to briefly address his discussion of the casuistic question.

THE CASUISTIC QUESTION

Not all of our demands can end up in a single system of truth, and so the moral philosopher must try to decide which demands should be kept, and which demands must go. James presents the moral philosopher's proposed answer to this casuistic question as follows:

Since everything which is demanded is by that fact a good, must not the guiding principle for ethical philosophy (since all demands conjointly cannot be satisfied in this poor world) be simply to satisfy at all times *as many demands as we can*? That act must be the best act, accordingly, which makes for the *best whole*, in the sense of awakening the least sum of dissatisfactions. In the casuistic scale, therefore, those ideals must be written highest which *prevail at the least cost*, or by whose realization the least possible number of other ideals are destroyed.³⁰

Since the moral philosopher has no demands other than that there be a system, they will treat all other ideals equally, which suggests that they would take some sort of maximization to be the optimal arrangement. The idea seems to be to imagine all of the separate demands/desires/ideals taken into one consciousness that would then sort them out in just the way that the moral solitude would sort out their own conflicting demands.³¹

I don't think that much hangs (at least for the purposes of this paper) on the details of James's proposal about the casuistic question.³² In particular, the question of whether he is suggesting we satisfy the most demands, the strongest demands, or the demands of the most people (all of which James suggests at various points) may not have a clear answer. Neither should we worry too much about whether James is suggesting that we maximize the satisfaction of desires,³³ demands,³⁴ or even ideals,³⁵ since James just needs a general sense of all of the imperatives to be in play here. If all of the demands/desires/ideals were taken into a single consciousness, the resulting resolution would be a maximization of some sort, but arriving at it certainly needn't have a clear quantitative recipe.

Further, it should be noted (though James does not) that it isn't obvious that any sort of pure maximization strategy would be the *only* thing that appeals to the moral philosopher when they create their system. Of course maximization must have some appeal, but while the moral philosopher may not have any demands other than putting all of the other demands into a "system of truth," other works of James's (most notably, "The Sentiment of Rationality") show that such a demand is by no means a simple one, and even the disinterested moral philosopher may have theoretical ideals that help dictate the form of a preferred system of truth but may not always sit well with maximization.³⁶ For instance, a demand for a certain kind of systematicity and unity may push the moral philosopher in ways that conflict with simple maximization. Perhaps one moral philosopher will endorse a more Kantian system because of its beauty, while another will defend something closer to utilitarianism because of its simplicity, while still another may prefer messier

systems that actually satisfy more demands.³⁷ The conflicting cravings for universality and acquaintance that James describes in “The Sentiment of Rationality” could produce radically different moral theories among different moral philosophers, even those who left their other demands off the table.

Still, whatever their theoretical preferences are, one reason for the moral philosopher to not stray *too* far from maximizing the number of demands satisfied is that comparatively maximal systematizations may be the ones most likely to get a wide uptake. An ethical system, coherent or not, will not reach a stable equilibrium if the people embodying it are not satisfied with living the life that it dictates, and an adequate ethical theory must thus fit the grain of our “ethical experience.” A systematization that appeals to moral philosophers, and moral philosophers alone, seems poorly placed to make up the objective truth about ethics, since it is the *actual demanders* that create the truth, and if they can’t be brought into line with the system, then that system fails to hold true for them, and we are left with the plurality of subjective values rather than anything objective. The more inclusive system will be more likely to be widely adopted, and James thinks there is already a natural drift in this direction.

The course of history is nothing but the story of men’s struggles from generation to generation to find the more and more inclusive order. *Invent some manner* of realizing your own ideals which will also satisfy the alien demands,—that and that only is the path of peace! Following this faith, society has shaken into one sort of relative equilibrium after another by a series of social discoveries quite analogous to those of science.³⁸

James proposes one of these more inclusive arrangements himself when he suggests that we harmonize the conflicting militaristic and pacifist ideals within a new form of public service as “part of the army enlisted against *nature*,”³⁹ but James is generally wary of such “closet-solutions,”⁴⁰ and on the whole he thinks that this maximization can’t be determined *a priori*.

The pure philosopher can only follow the windings of the spectacle, confident that the line of least resistance will always be towards the richer and the more inclusive arrangement, and that by one tack after another some approach to the kingdom of heaven is incessantly made. . . . so far as the casuistic question goes, ethical science is just like physical science, and instead of being deducible all at once from abstract principles, must simply bide its time, and be ready to revise its conclusions from day to day.⁴¹

That said, while *some* progress might be made, no amount of peace-core-like proposals are going to take us all the way to the sort of harmony that ethical objectivity requires.

Even if the moral philosopher did find a way to systematized all of our demands that was optimal in some relevant sense, this wouldn't be enough to create a system of truth unless they were able to get a buy-in from all the participants, and, this world being what it is, even the most optimal system is going to leave many of us with fewer demands satisfied than we had before. Why should the moral philosopher believe that such a universal buy-in is possible?

THE WILL TO BELIEVE OPTION

The simple answer is that such a belief is part of what it is, by definition, to be a moral philosopher, in James's sense. Still, one would hope that the moral philosopher could have *some* justification for this belief. James was, of course, well aware there was no compelling evidence that we could ever reach the sort of lasting convergence his account of ethical objectivity requires, but he still felt we were entitled to believe that such a stable convergence would eventually be reached. In particular, the belief in the possibility of such a convergence was an instance of the sort of case covered in his "The Will to Believe."⁴² That is to say, whether we will reach such a consensus is an evidentially unsettled question about which we have the right to follow our inclinations about what to believe. Not only was the question of the objectivity of morals, at least for James, "live," "force," and "momentous," but the belief in such objectivity is arguably one of those beliefs that could contribute to their own truth. By believing that convergence can, and will,

eventually be reached, we may help bring it about (and such a consensus probably won't ever be reached if parties with conflicting ethical beliefs are convinced that no such consensus is possible).

On James's account, it is an *empirical* question whether ethical claims have objective content or not. However, the question is also, crucially, a *practical* one. Whether we *in fact* ever reach the sort of ethical consensus the objectivity of our ethical claims requires is, in James's eyes, *up to us*. We can't simply decide that values are objective, but it may remain within our power to (collectively) make them so. This movement of the question of objectivity from the theoretical to the practical realm is one of the most characteristic features of James's pragmatism.

Still, even if ethical objectivity is evidentially underdetermined in *some* sense, given the way that James cashes it out, the evidence seems pretty compelling against it, and this brings us to the remarkable theistic turn that James's paper takes toward its end.

THE ROLE OF GOD IN ETHICS

James notoriously concludes his paper by arguing that "the stable and systematic moral universe for which the ethical philosopher asks is fully possible only in a world where there is a divine thinker with all-enveloping demands," and this turn can seem like quite a surprise given that James's initial answers to the psychological, metaphysical, and casuistic questions seem to work within a more naturalistic framework.⁴³ So just what work is God doing here?

Now, God isn't here simply as some sort of divine commander who makes up an independent moral order.⁴⁴ Even if God endorsed a specific systematization, it still wouldn't be binding on us unless we were willing to endorse it ourselves, since

the only force of appeal to *us*, which either a living God or an abstract ideal order can wield, is found in the "everlasting ruby vaults" of our own human hearts, as they happen to beat responsive and not irresponsible to the claim.⁴⁵

Much the same could be said for the idea that God grounds objectivity on this model by tipping the casuistic scale his way in

virtue of having an *infinite* number of desires (or perhaps just *really, really, really* strong versions of the desires that he does have).⁴⁶ The desires of an “infinite demander” might drown out the rest and tip the moral philosopher’s casuistic scale their way, but, once again, the moral philosopher’s casuistic scale isn’t automatically binding on regular folk, and so simply having an agent with infinite desires isn’t enough to ground objectivity.⁴⁷ If we don’t endorse the infinite demander’s demands, then it’s not clear why they are binding on us.

This points, however, to a related claim that James makes, namely that the demands “put forward by insignificant persons” can be taken less seriously than those of the rest.⁴⁸ This can sound like elitism on James’s part,⁴⁹ but there is no need to understand James’s talk of significance in an elitist way.⁵⁰ In particular, the desires of significant people can be understood as carrying more weight than the desires of insignificant ones because when a significant person wants something to occur, they can *create* a desire in others (and this comes not just from the others’ desire to curry favor with the significant person). This is often the sense in which, say, the child’s demands are significant for the parent. Indeed, the significant person’s demands may give the other a reason to bring about an outcome even if they think the significant person will never know their role in making that happen. On the other hand, a desire of an insignificant person may have no tendency to create corresponding desires on the part of others.

In this respect, God may have potential as the ultimate significant person, since many people would change their ideals to fit God’s *just because they are God’s ideals*. God’s ideals overshadow the others, not because they are stronger in the sense of being more numerous or intense, but rather because they have the power to inspire other people to bring their own ideals into line with them.

God’s potential for this sort of significance consists at least in part in the ability of religious belief to release in us what James calls the “strenuous mood.” According to James,

The deepest difference, practically, in the moral life of man is the difference between the easy-going and the strenuous mood. When in the easy-going mood the shrinking from present ill is our ruling consideration. *The strenuous mood, on the contrary, makes us quite indifferent to present ill, if only the greater ideal be attained.*⁵¹

Even if the moral philosopher were able to work out an ideal casuistic formula, they couldn't, without some divine help, realistically expect others to make the required effort to endorse it. Doing the right thing can occasionally be hard, and some days we can just expect people to adopt the easy-going mood and treat themselves to a Caribbean holiday instead of giving their extra money to charity. As James puts it, "in a merely human world without a God, the appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulating power."⁵²

However, if God were in play, and we knew he endorsed the ideal casuistic scale, then perhaps we could *happily endorse* it as well, even if it was not quite as comfortable for us as some others. As James puts it, "we joyously face tragedy for an infinite demanders' sake," (and so are happy to, say, forgo our everyday pleasures in order to bring about the greater good).⁵³ To happily live with any unified and stable casuistic scale, we need our moral energy to be at "its maximal stimulating power," and James thinks that it can't stay at that level without God in the picture.⁵⁴ Of course, not *every* divine being might inspire us in this way, but James thinks that *only* something divine could do so, and he admits that he "would openly laugh at the very idea of the strenuous mood being awakened in us by those claims of Remote Posterity which constitute the last appeal of the religion of humanity."⁵⁵ The strenuous mood is often discussed as important for getting us to do things that are the right things to do *anyway*, but according to the reading above, it is even more important than this.⁵⁶ The strenuous mood is required of *us* for anything to be objectively right *at all*, since the sort of consensus needed to produce ethical objectivity may not be available to us without it.⁵⁷

Of course, it takes only the *belief* in God to unleash the strenuous mood, but the strenuous mood is no boon for the moral philosopher if it's directed the wrong way. Royce's moral insight and the pluralistic inclusivity associated with it can, in many ways, seem much more appealing to those in the "easy-going" or "genial" mood. The easy-going type might not be as motivated to make sacrifices for the inclusive order, but the inclusive object of action might still appeal to them. The more strenuous (or "stern")⁵⁸ type, on the other hand, are typically just strenuous about *their own* ideals, and are often not motivated to support (indeed, they are often motivated to *oppose*) the ideals of others.⁵⁹ We need a very particular type of God to direct the strenuous mood in the right way, and if such a God doesn't exist, we are all unlikely to find ourselves believing in something like them anyway.

Another reason for James to want God (and not just the belief in God) in the picture is that, even if there is an ideal ordering of *all* the demands, it doesn't seem like a single person could hold such a complex system in their head. Since James requires that any ultimate ideal be consciously held,⁶⁰ it might seem that we would want a divine consciousness in place just to have the concrete embodiment of the ideal judgements. God also has the potential to provide a *stable* voice so that what satisfies the most demands doesn't change,⁶¹ which is important, since James maintains that ethical objectivity requires not only that there will eventually be a type of convergence among our needs and moral views but also that such a convergence will endure.

CONCLUSION: WHAT'S LEFT OF ETHICAL TRUTH?

So, where does this leave us if just the right sort of God doesn't turn up to activate the strenuous mood and rally us around the sort of maximizing ideal associated with the casuistic question? This a possibility that James's moral philosopher may not be able to seriously consider, and while James at least *hopes* this won't be the case, he does provide a framework for talking about the situation should it occur.

After all, that James would be open to at least the *possibility* of there being no objective, or absolute, truth in ethics should hardly be surprising given that in later works such as *Pragmatism* he shows a healthy amount of skepticism about absolute truth more generally. In its place he stresses the importance of *temporary* truths for our practice. As he famously put it:

The ‘absolutely’ true, meaning what no further experience will ever alter, is that ideal vanishing-point towards which we imagine that all our temporary truths will some day converge. It runs on all fours with the perfectly wise man, and with the absolutely complete experience; and, if these ideals were ever realized, they will all be realized together. Meanwhile we have to live today by what truth we can get today, and be ready tomorrow to call it falsehood.⁶²

Ultimately it may be such temporary truth that we need to be satisfied with for our ethical claims as well. James still takes absolute truth as a regulative ideal for all of our inquiries, but the possibility that this ideal may not be realized remains for him very much a live one. That sort of “dual consciousness” can be hard to consistently maintain globally but is easier to lay out when talking about a comparatively discrete topic like ethics, where the regulative ideal can be bracketed and assigned to someone like the moral philosopher. The moral philosopher cannot accept that our ethical claims are only temporarily true, and while James certainly hopes they will be more than this as well, he suspects that without a helping hand from the divine, temporary truth may be all we can manage.

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NOTES

¹ Allen, *William James*, 423, 457. For instance, James’s pragmatism lectures in New York drew audiences of over 1000 people, while his Gifford Lectures consistently attracted audiences of 250-300 people, compared to, say, Royce’s Gifford Lectures two years earlier which had their attendance dwindle to as low as fifteen.

² Reprinted in James, *Will to Believe*.

³ James, *Correspondence*, 175.

⁴ One could even characterize his position as a type of semantic *pessimism*. However, while James’s view can make moral objectivity seem *unlikely*, he certainly does not consider a lack of objectivity to be

inevitable, and since James associates pessimism with a type of inevitability, I will stick with “semantic fallibilism” rather than “semantic pessimism” here.

⁵ James, “MPML,” 142.

⁶ James, 142.

⁷ James, 145.

⁸ James, 148.

⁹ For a discussion of this “thorny problem,” see Gale, *Divided Self*, 44; and Gale, *Philosophy*, 31.

¹⁰ James, “MPML,” 145-6. One should note, however, that James denies that the claims of the moral solitude would be *true*. As he puts it: “it would of course be absurd to raise the question of whether the solitary thinker’s judgments of good and ill are *true* or not. Truth presupposes a standard outside of the thinker to which he must conform. But here the thinker is a sort of divinity, subject to no higher judge” (146; See also James, “Notes for Philosophy,” 184). That said, he believes something like this is true of our “descriptive” beliefs as well, and that “Should we ever reach absolutely terminal experiences, experiences in which we all agreed, which were superseded by no revised continuations, these would not be *true*, they would be *real*, they would *simply be*” (James “The Essence of Humanism,” 103).

¹¹ Aiken and Talisse, “Still Searching,” points out that James’s thoughts on the relation between demands and values can be understood in two ways: Either something has value simply by being valued (the “phenomenalist” interpretation of the relation between values and valuing), or something has value only if it is valued after we succeed in bringing our initial values into an equilibrium (the “coordinating” interpretation of the relation between values and valuing). They then go on to argue that James endorses the phenomenalist interpretation of the relation, so that the coordinating interpretation defended in Jackman, (“Jamesian Pluralism”), while possibly a pragmatist view, is not James’s. However, as we can see in the discussion of the moral solitude, James endorses *both* the phenomenalist and coordinating interpretations of the relation between values and valuing. James turns out to be a phenomenalist about *prima-facie* goods (the subjective values) and a coordinatist about what is good all things considered (the objective values).

¹² James, “MPML,” 146.

¹³ James, 150.

¹⁴ To say nothing of the “demands” of non-human animals.

¹⁵ Peirce, “Fixation,” 120.

¹⁶ Though some (see Misak, Atkins, and Heney) think Peirce himself did apply his model to ethics as well, though even if he had, this seems more characteristic of his post-1905 work (see Heney) than the positions he was defending when James presented “MPML.”

¹⁷ James, “MPML,” 148.

¹⁸ James, 142.

¹⁹ James, 142.

²⁰ James discusses these aspects of our mental life that are “brain born,” “born inside the house,” or coming through the “back stairs” or “back door” extensively in the final chapter of his *Principles of Psychology* (especially 1224-6).

²¹ James, “Notes for Philosophy,” 183.

²² James, “MPML,” 143.

²³ James, 153.

²⁴ James, *Talks to Teachers*, 149-50.

²⁵ See Royce, *Religious Aspect*, 165-7 for a similar emphasis on the plurality of our aims and the lack of apparent unity behind it. To put the problem in contemporary terms, if we thought we were engaged in a more-or-less Rawlsian project of bringing out moral intuitions into some sort of reflective equilibrium, the project would be considerably harder if psychologists like Haidt are correct that these intuitions stem from six different sources that have evolved to track occasionally conflicting “ideals” such as Care, Fairness, Liberty, Loyalty, Authority, and Sanctity respectively (with most “weird,” (i.e. Western, educated, industrial, rich, democratic), with moral philosophers being comparatively blind to all but the first three (see Haidt, 297)). If there were a single source, one might think that, if put behind some sort of “veil of ignorance,” we would all settle on a similar equilibrium, but having the six sources makes getting to an equilibrium considerably harder, and if it turns out that different people feel the pull of these conflicting sources to different degrees, the prospect of reaching an equilibrium for the entire group seems even more distant.

²⁶ James, “MPML,” 141.

²⁷ James, 146-7.

²⁸ James, 151; 141-2 and “Notes for Philosophy,” 182.

²⁹ And this separates James's moral philosopher quite radically from actual moral philosophers, most of whom bring with them various substantive moral commitments they wish to defend.

³⁰ James, "MPML," 155.

³¹ This is, as James admits, a version of Royce's "moral insight" (James, "Notes for Philosophy," 185 and Royce, *Religious Aspect*, 141). In many respects it can seem as if James very much has Royce in mind when he speaks of the moral philosopher.

³² In this respect, I'm inclined to agree with Marchetti (*Ethics*, 105) that James is more making a tentative proposal than trying to present a full-blown theory.

³³ Gale, *Divided Self and Philosophy*.

³⁴ Slater, *William James on Ethics and Faith* and Bush, *William James on Democratic Individuality*.

³⁵ Cooper, *Unity*.

³⁶ As Boyle (1998, 995) points out, creating an "ethical symphony" requires more than just isolating the loudest and longest notes.

³⁷ Of course, there are many (Gale, *Divided Self and Philosophy*; Slater, Myers, Cooper) who suggest that James's casuistic maxim is just a version of utilitarianism. The relation of James's thought to utilitarianism is complex, and it should not be forgotten that in his discussion of the "lost soul" earlier in "MPML," he seems to deny that it would be right for there to be "millions kept permanently happy on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life of lonely torture" (144). However, the lost soul is not a counterexample to James's casuistic rule (though it may be one for any attempt to read him as a hedonistic utilitarian); rather, it just shows that he assumes we have a *very* strong demand that our happiness not be secured in such a fashion. If no one would be willing to satisfy their demands this way, then demand-satisfaction is not maximized by making this sort of compromise. This demand, like many others, may just be a "brain-born" psychological fact about us, and if this fact were to change, James might be committed to allowing such a case. Still, it is noteworthy that if we reject a world where our happiness is secured by such suffering, it is noticeably different from simply rejecting a world where we *are aware that* our happiness is secured by such suffering. The casuistic principle is supposed to maximize the number of demands satisfied, not just the number of demands whose

demanders *think* they are satisfied. This emphasis on objective satisfaction, rather than the more subjective *felt* satisfaction, would insulate James's account from the "Jane Hood" worry that Aiken and Talisse ("Three Challenges" and *Pragmatism, Pluralism*) present for James's account. Aiken and Talisse argue that if a particular billionaire is rich enough, Jane Hood could steal money from them and they wouldn't notice. Aiken and Talisse conclude that James thus can't explain the [purported?] fact that stealing is still wrong in this situation. However, if the billionaire's demands include people not stealing from him (not just his unawareness of being stolen from), then it seems James can easily explain the *prima facie* wrongness of this case.

³⁸ James, "MPML," 155-6.

³⁹ James, *Essays on Religion and Morality*, 171.

⁴⁰ James, "MPML," 157. After all, he opens "MPML" with the claim that its main purpose "is to show that there is no such thing possible as an ethical philosophy dogmatically made up in advance" (141).

⁴¹ James, 157.

⁴² See especially James, *Will to Believe*, 28. James's will to believe doctrine is presented in fuller detail in Jackman, "Prudential Arguments."

⁴³ James, "MPML," 161.

⁴⁴ Though see Cantrell, "Transcendental," for a recent defense of the claim that James is a divine command theorist.

⁴⁵ James, "MPML," 149.

⁴⁶ And James certainly does talk about God as if he would have the greatest amount of, indeed, infinite, demands. (See, for instance, "MPML" 149, 161).

⁴⁷ James, 161.

⁴⁸ James, 149.

⁴⁹ See Gale, *Divided Self*, 245 and *Philosophy*, 32, for a characterization of James's view as elitist.

⁵⁰ Nor need we follow Gale (*Divided Self*, 46 and *Philosophy*, 32-33) in seeing a person's "significance" as merely corresponding to how *assertive* they are about putting forth their demands.

⁵¹ James, "MPML," 159-60, italics mine.

⁵² James, 160.

⁵³ James, 161.

⁵⁴ James, 160. The motivating power of religious belief is a major theme in James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, where he describes religious experience as providing a "feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world's selfish little interests" (219) and a "shifting of the emotional centre towards loving and harmonious affections" (220) so that "[m]agnanimities once impossible are now easy" (216). In short,

...in those states of mind which fall short of religion, the surrender is submitted to as an imposition of necessity, and the sacrifice is undergone at the very best without complaint. In the religious life, on the contrary, surrender and sacrifice are positively espoused: even unnecessary givings-up are added in order that the happiness may increase. *Religion thus makes easy and felicitous what in any case is necessary.* (49)

⁵⁵ James, "MPML," 160.

⁵⁶ As suggested recently in Lekan, "Strenuous" and Slater, *William James on Ethics and Faith*.

⁵⁷ Admittedly, it might seem that with this sort of "inspiring" God in the picture, we could achieve a consensus on *any* systematization. However, while James certainly thinks we might happily make sacrifices when divinely inspired, there may be limits to such inspiration, and while the strenuous mood gives us a "push," it is pushing against weaker headwinds if it is toward something that approaches James's answer to the casuistic question.

⁵⁸ In his Harvard lectures in the year prior to "MPML," he seemed to refer to the "strenuous" as the "stern" mood. (James, *Manuscript Essays*, 303, 305, 306.)

⁵⁹ See, for instance, Aiken and Talisse, *Pragmatism, Pluralism*, 86, for a discussion of how actual religious beliefs can make inclusive accommodation more difficult.

⁶⁰ "If one ideal judgment be objectively better than another, that betterness must be 'made flesh' by being lodged and concreted in some one's actual perception." James, "MPML," 147.

⁶¹ For a discussion of the importance of such stability, see Bush, *Democratic Individuality*.

⁶² James, *Pragmatism*, 106-7.

PRAGMATIC INTERRUPTION:
HABITS, ENVIRONMENTS, ETHICS

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This essay envisions a habit of revising habits, that is, a habit of openness and transformation. By examining William James’s descriptions of habits and his attention to the environments in which habits both function and break down, I offer a particular aesthetic engagement with the “thickness” of the entangled, textured environments in which we find ourselves. My *active* and *mundane* approach to “pragmatic thickness” and “pragmatic interruption” is different from both more *receptive* approaches to thickness and *transcendental* forms of interruption presented in recent Continental philosophy. In the fashion of James and by way of conclusion, I offer two maxims that address the ethical implications of a habit of interruption.



“Nobody sees a flower really . . . We haven’t time, and to see takes time.”

—Georgia O’Keeffe

For William James, change always occurs in the context of continuity. In this essay, I consider changes in habit by addressing the “interruption” that occurs when a belief is called into question, breaks down in practice, or no longer works for specific purposes. Drawing on his psychological knowledge, James understands that the possibility of interrupting habits decreases over time. He is suspicious, moreover, that changing a habit could be as simple as willing oneself to behave differently. My guiding question becomes: (How) Can an individual *habituate* an ability to revise habits, to re-fashion oneself? In other words, could “interruption” itself become a habit? In their focus on interruption and day-to-day practices, these questions place my essay in conversation with the recent scholarship of Megan Craig and Vincent Colapietro. “What one needs,” Craig writes, “is a habit of disrupting fixations—a very peculiar habit in the art of self-interruption and transformation.”¹ My essay responds to, and develops upon, Craig’s call for this peculiar need. Further, with Colapietro, I treat “the everyday practices of human actors” as ethical sites wherein “possibilities for *living otherwise* than we do now lay claim to more than the moral imagination.”² I take this to mean that, more than just an individual’s consideration of her own self-becoming, everyday experiences can bear on the individual such that she becomes committed to re-making, with others, both herself and the historical present.

To address my questions, we need first to define habit. I begin by looking to James’s chapter on habit in the first volume of his 1890 *The Principles of Psychology*. To approach how one can interrupt a habit beyond willing them so, I then look to James’s commentary in his 1892 public lecture, “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” in which he suggests that habits change when one’s environment changes—not only geographically, but also in attempts to see from another’s point of view. To bring into further relief the

sense of “pragmatic interruption” I am sketching, I both contrast it to interruption in recent continental philosophy and develop the concept of “pragmatic thickness” (Part 2). In the fashion of James, I conclude by offering two maxims for practicing a habit of interruption, and I describe a concrete instance in which this habit could bear social fruit today.

PART ONE: PLASTICITY, INERTIA, TRAINING

James learned from C. S. Peirce’s claim that a belief is “a habit of action,” and James expanded on this claim in light of his studies of psychology and varying personal experience, e.g. traveling to North Carolina or Brazil. So important is habit, he writes, that we can best understand perception, memory, and reasoning as results and active functions of it. To begin, James compares instinct and habit. While instincts contribute to the formation of habits, they consist of pre-established paths; habits, by contrast, are new and reiterated paths allowed for by the “plasticity” of the organism. Habit, then, indicates plasticity or agility—the individual is not merely determined, and hence actions *matter*. With regard to the central question of this essay, this is a crucial insight: The very existence of habits indicates that new habits can be formed.

For James, habit is material: To define habit, one must work with “fundamental properties of matter.”³ Neurophysiology alters as new pathways of discharge form in the brain. Such a new form then becomes the new habit, set like plaster. “When the structure has yielded, the same inertia becomes a condition of its comparative permanence in the new form, and of the new habits the body then manifests.”⁴ “Inertia” here suggests the importance or weight of habituation. Like other physical matter, my choices, materially formed in pathways, have a tendency to continue unchanged, at rest or in motion, until some external force changes that state. It is from this material basis that James describes the partial yielding of a structure as “plasticity.” Re-habituation, as the formation of new pathways, depends on this material plasticity. Yet the brain is not plastic to all external influences. A pathway does not change just because the temperature gets hotter outside, for instance.⁵ In sum,

habit has a “neutral valence”; it always cuts both ways, as it were, conservative in its repetition and open-ended in its plasticity.⁶ As Megan Craig reiterates, “Habit is a critical part of progression and acclimation, but it is also the source of stubborn anchorage in patterns that diminish one’s capacity for creativity and blind one to alternative possibilities for action.”⁷

James then moves from a physiological account of habits to a discussion of their social, ethical, or practical effects. He writes firstly, “[H]abit simplifies the movements required to achieve a given result, makes them accurate, and diminishes fatigue.”⁸ In this way, habit economizes actions and makes them more efficient. Each morning I lace up my boots almost without effort, without thinking, in practiced, accurate movements. James writes secondly that “*habit diminishes the conscious attention with which our acts are performed.*”⁹ “Diminish” suggests that much attention *was* once required, and this cashes out in experience. Before learning to tie my boots, I needed many attempts to figure out just how the laces form a knot. I had to pause many times, boots still loose. Now, following the “cue” of picking up the laces, before I know it, and with little attention, I have tied my boots—and perhaps I came up with a new way of thinking about care for the soul in the *Alcibiades* as I tied the knot. In this way, I did not have to focus my “higher thought-centre” on the habituated act, for “mere sensation”—lace against hand—“is a sufficient guide.”¹⁰ This also means that merely *starting* is sufficient, in habitual action, to set off a chain that does not require consistent choices and rejections, as is the case in testing out non-habitual chains of action. When patterns of how to tie the knot were not yet “set,” I consistently pulled the laces in different combinations. Now I can step outside of my situation, as it were, to see that my hand began by pulling the laces together, and so on; but in performing the actions themselves, we usually do not notice these precise moments of contact between hand, lace, and boot.

Hence James writes, thirdly, what is habitual is that to which “we are *usually inattentive.*”¹¹ Yet he clearly says that habits are more than unconscious because they “immediately call our attention if they go *wrong.*”¹² As I consider Alcibiades’s destructive

ambition, I am not attending to my knot, but when the right bunny ear of the shoelace does not hold, I begin to attend again to my boots, forgetting about Socrates teaching Alcibiades that care for his soul is in fact beneficial for political engagement. As I habituate myself to tying my boots, I not only get better—move more fluidly, less attentively—at tying them, but I also get better at sensing when I am going to tie an uneven or weak knot. This improvement, however, regards only the particular purposes of the task at hand; we should not confuse individual efficiency with social amelioration. As aforementioned, James notes that habit has a strong inertia, such that its practice “end[s] by fashioning a man completely over again, as to most of the possibilities of his conduct.”¹³ We can see this in the retired Marine who still wakes up before sunrise each day. For this reason, writ social, habit is society’s “most precious conservative agent.”¹⁴ Out of habit—itsself knotted with economic desperation, generational loyalties, an identification with a certain lifestyle, and so on—the miner walks each morning back down into the mine, notwithstanding the chemicals he inhales without fail during his grueling shift. Out of habit, the taxi driver passes by the country club with clients from the airport, thinking *that* is not a place for her—as it never has been.

Sensitive to these social circumscriptions while returning to the individual, we each have to “fight out the battle of life upon the lines of our nurture or our early choice.”¹⁵ Our ability to change habits decreases over time; the weight of habits adds up to more than I can push against easily. Here again, James invokes the metaphor of plaster: My professional character sets by age thirty, my personal character by twenty. The inertia, or weight, of habit is “[a]n invisible law, as strong as gravitation,” that keeps the individual “within his orbit.”¹⁶ Hence a pedagogical suggestion, namely, to work with, and not against, the nervous system—an ally and not an enemy. James suggests starting early with useful habits and guarding ourselves against inefficient, unhelpful, and indecisive habits. In the face of such inertia and sedimentation, the question becomes if one can—and if so how to—re-fashion oneself, especially as one ages.¹⁷ Our habits condition us, but they do not determine us, and changing these

habits involves not only our own material plasticity but also that of our environment. Changing habits is a problem in practice because the environment in which one finds oneself is not static or fixed but dynamic and plastic. That is, the pragmatic need for plasticity is actively responding to its changing environment.

James begins by looking to the will: First, we must “*launch ourselves*” with great motivation and position ourselves in settings that will support this launch.¹⁸ If I want to begin to paint pine trees in watercolor, I need to acquire paints and brushes, take more of my lunches outside near the nature preserve adjacent to my campus, tell a friend about my desire so that she might invite me to a nearby state park on the weekends, and commit to painting pine trees each Sunday morning. All of these actions “give [my] new beginning . . . a momentum.”¹⁹ Second, I must not break with the momentum until my watercolor painting has, in fact, become a habit, for before that point, I have not reached the repetitions that my nervous system needs to “set” differently. In this way, I “train” myself in habituation just as a distance runner trains to complete a marathon. Part of my success will depend on how I frame my task. Too rigorous or demanding and I fail from the beginning. I need to know myself well enough to pose an achievable end-in-view. Third, I must act on my resolution as soon as possible. If I vow to paint at least on Saturdays, and I make this vow on Friday night, then *this* Saturday I should begin, and better even if I set out to the supply store for paints, brushes, and canvas tonight. Here James comments on an important point: Habits are not just cognitive, but behavioral. “It is not in the moment of their forming, but in the moment of their producing *motor effects*, that resolves and aspirations communicate the new ‘set’ to the brain.”²⁰ That is, I form a new habit not in thinking about it but in doing it; I learn to paint pine trees by painting them. Maxims, sentiments, and intentions—with respect to practice—are subordinate to actions. The importance of taking up an opportunity to *act* also reveals the severity of its inverse, namely, allowing a resolve not to be acted upon, which “works so as positively to hinder future resolutions and emotions from taking the normal path of discharge.”²¹ If I do not paint *this* Saturday, it will make it more

difficult to paint *next* Saturday, having begun to habituate the pattern of resolving to act, but not acting.

Like in his discussion of inertia, here James points to the ethical consequences of not acting on resolve or emotion. We see this in the theater-goer, filled with sadness at the poverty depicted in the play, but having little concern for the theatre-student valet, who will make sure the former's Lexus is warm and at the ready when she emerges from the show. A remedy: "[N]ever to suffer one's self to have an emotion at a concert, without expressing it afterward in *some* active way."²² The expression could be small, even a larger tip or a sincere greeting; the point is to begin, here and now, concretely in action.

James suggests, fourthly—and as “a final practical maxim”—to keep effort alive through daily “*gratuitous exercise . . .* be systematically ascetic or heroic in little unnecessary points, do every day or two something for no other reason than that you would rather not do it.”²³ Here we see how the development of just one habit is related to a more general comportment. A certain priming of the organism contributes to habit-formation. If I aim to paint trees on Saturday, then, to have the effort required to launch myself into that re-habitation, I should roast local vegetables on Thursday evenings, a more complicated and time-consuming effort than boiling processed spaghetti.²⁴ These day-to-day tasks are my “training” for harder activities. “Training” also invokes the importance of resistance, opposition, and struggle in daily living. Certain forms of resistance do not limit but in fact make possible change in the individual. There is a future-oriented value in “concentrated attention, energetic volition, and self-denial in unnecessary things.”²⁵ That is, they present *opportunities* for growth. I will note here—especially for those sympathetic to asceticism, as I am—that by “self-denial” James does not mean some kind of *withdrawal* from the world, e.g. an expensive meditation retreat in a far-off location. Instead, he is envisioning a different *engagement* with the world from where I am now, setting out with my current habits and in my current place. Avoiding a nightly trip to get frozen custard with a friend, a dietary and budgetary point of weakness for me, is different from avoiding food.

This recalls why James considers Aristotle a pragmatist: The mean to be found, in Aristotle's *Ethics*, is always *relative to the individual*.

In sum, we might now reflect on what resources James offers in regard to my initial question: How can one form a habit of forming new habits? He suggests that some conditions of habit-formation are found in will, in attention and effort, and that we can develop these conditions through difficult, unnecessary, and often unwanted exercise or "training." And yet, through his psychological sensibilities, he understands that just as being acted upon externally and called into doubt once is not enough to habituate interruption, so too is willing new habits insufficient for self-transformation. As Craig explains, "Sheer effort, strength, and will are not enough to ensure one *retains* a sense of openness to life."²⁶ In positing the will's insufficiency with respect to causing *lasting* self-transformation, I gain some distance from Colin Koopman's recent reading of James, which claims that "'willful rehabilitation' could also be usefully described as 'self-transformation.'"²⁷ It is precisely this distance between the two terms that I want to emphasize, for the environments in which one finds oneself also condition the move from will to transformation.

To consider further the external forces that act against the inertia of habit, and with a particular view toward *retaining* fruits of rehabilitation, in Part 2 I will develop a concept of "pragmatic interruption" that occurs in the "thickness" of this world—in everyday contexts that bear differently on different subject-positions. While my focus is specifically on the habits of an individual, I will also attend to the social conditions that allow for, or hinder, an individual's ability to engage in a habit of re-vision habit. Indeed, one's habits are always irreducibly social, formed within the *ethos* in which one finds oneself. My contention is that the re-vision that interruption necessitates, that the irritation that doubt inspires, can *open* the individual to different ways of living, and that these openings to alternative ways of engaging the world resonate with what Craig calls "the *ethical significance* of attending to multiple meanings in multiple forms."²⁸ On my reading, such openings are fostered by efforts of aesthetic, embodied

engagements, and one is more likely to retain such a sense of openness when certain environmental features are set. Below, I read “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings” in order to suggest that James’s response to this “certain blindness” is radically and deeply sensual and embodied.²⁹ Addressing this blindness—this limitation—points to alternative possibilities for ethics, in turn.

PART TWO: INEFFICIENCY, THICKNESS, ENGAGEMENTS

Attending to affect, James begins “On a Certain Blindness” with an anthropological description: “Our judgments concerning the worth of things, big or little, depend on the *feelings* the things arouse in us.”³⁰ Indeed, I ascribe the most value to whatever arouses the most feeling *in me*. In this way, prioritizing my own sentiments, I am insensitive to what inspires feelings in others. James then states explicitly his topic of investigation: “[T]he blindness in human beings, of which this discourse will treat, is the blindness with which we are all afflicted in regard to the feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves.”³¹ That is, we are practical and limited beings, so we feel intensely the importance of our own duties.³² Consequently, our opinions fall prey to stupidity at best and injustice at worst, and our judgments are false “so far as they presume to decide in an absolute way on the value of other persons’ conditions or ideals.”³³ Indeed, James criticizes his titular metaphor of vision while employing it: “The spectator’s judgment is sure to miss the root of the matter, and to possess no truth.”³⁴

Always concerned that philosophy be grounded, perspectival, “owned,” James gives the example of his own visit to a rural “cove” in North Carolina.³⁵ On his initial view, he sees the cove as a disaster, and he believes that the rural landscape should be preserved. “The beauties and commodities gained by the centuries are sacred . . . No modern person ought to be willing to live a day in such a state of rudimentariness and denudation.”³⁶ He takes a moment, however, to reflect on his own “blindness” and hence on what he might see from the perspective of those living there. “[W]hen *they* looked on the hideous stumps, what they thought of was personal victory . . . the clearing, which to me was a mere ugly

picture on the retina, was to them a symbol redolent with moral memories and sang a very paean of duty, struggle, and success.”³⁷

Thus, James de-centers himself. He acknowledges that he is as “blind” to the reality—in its full density and (practical) meaning—of the cove-dwellers as they would be to his university life at Harvard. Two implications follow. First, James grounds the significance of life not on an *a priori* hierarchical set of standards, but on individual and perspectival feeling. “Wherever a process of life communicates an eagerness to him who lives it, there the life becomes genuinely significant.”³⁸ Second, James writes that it is living according to “some specialized vocation” that contributes to one’s blindness in the first place, such that one features a “deadness toward all but one particular kind of joy”—this is the price we pay for being emotional, perspectival, indeed “practical creatures.”³⁹ That is, he levies a critique at thinking that is too instrumental or specialized, that attains its ends efficiently without considering other paths to joy. In this criticism of the always applied, professional person, he sketches a way for habits to change. It takes the character of a dreamer, philosopher, poet, or artist for “the hard externality” of specialization and efficiency to “give way . . . Then the whole scheme of our customary values gets confounded, then our self is riven and its narrow interests fly to pieces, then a new centre and a new perspective must be found.”⁴⁰

Here James provides a way, different from being acted upon by an external force, to challenge the inertia of habit, namely, to live passionately, like a dreamer. This is to act less like the financier on the highway only to reach the *telos* of capital accumulation and more like Whitman letting the everyday seep into him as he rides the streetcar in a manner autotelic—not to get somewhere, but to engage others and the world as the joyful activity itself. Thus the action of interrupting the specialized and hence limited way of living—the “faith in a fact” that “can help create the fact” or habit—could be a move toward un-specialization and loving.⁴¹ “The passion of love will shake one like an explosion, or some act will awaken a remorseful compunction that hangs like a cloud over all one’s later day.”⁴² Indeed, if we are able, with Whitman, to see “the submerged

and inner life of things around us,” then “we open ourselves to radical interruption and displacement.”⁴³ Through an attention to the “thickness” of the world, this world in which I am immersed and entangled with others, my perspective shifts.

What I am calling “pragmatic thickness” comes into further relief when we compare it with the thickness that recent Continental philosophy conceptualizes. Writing about “interpretive methods of phenomenology,” Walter Brueggemann “consider[s] these acts of interpretation under the rubric ‘dwelling in the thickness’ as an approach that refuses settlement and watches with attentiveness for interruption.”⁴⁴ In contrast to this phenomenological interruption, I am arguing that pragmatic interruption, while refusing settlement or fixity, is less an approach of “dwelling” and more an approach of engaging, acting, or moving—less watching with attentiveness and more an attending or effort that invites or effectuates an interruption. In its emphasis on here-and-now immanence and local context, and perhaps especially in its claims to continuity (in addition to change) and consequential action (in addition to watchfulness or reception), pragmatic interruption steps away from interruption in Continental thought, seen for instance in Levinas’s transcendental “Other” coming from “on high” or Badiou’s “event” that is a “break” from what was knowledgeable in the prevailing situation.⁴⁵ That is, I suggest that the emergent becomings-within-continuity of pragmatic interruption present an ethical comportment or fashion different from that which results from the more transcendent coming-and-breaking of some phenomenological interruption. Moreover, there is a democratic ring to the pragmatic interruption I am reading with James, achieved through an attentive and active response to mundane thickness. Although James cites poets as his examples for living passionately and perceptively, most any person could live in this way. (There is a larger question of social distribution of energies at play here; the democratic principle remains worth emphasizing.) John Lachs explains, “[W]e don’t have to be artists to see the marvelous riches of the world; attention to details is enough . . . a receptive *and* energetic appreciation of what surrounds us.”⁴⁶

A way of life that attends to the everyday, “the near, the low, the common,”⁴⁷ in its full thickness and granularity, is

an occupation which will change the usual standards of human value in the twinkling of an eye, giving to foolishness a place ahead of power, and laying low in a minute the distinctions which it takes a hard-working conventional man a lifetime to build up.⁴⁸

The instantaneity of “the twinkling of an eye” or “laying low in a minute” suggests a quick change in perspective but not in habit. How James outlines “occupation” indicates his point: Beyond just a job, “occupation” suggests a way of living or occupying one’s time—in other words, it suggests the habits one has fashioned over time. Such engagement changes standards because it dissolves the distinctions of the conventional man. It shifts the questions. If the conventional man asks, “What will you *do* with your degree from art school?” (as if making art was not itself a “doing”), the dreamer, perceptive of meaning in life, would ask: “How are you growing in your studies?” The questions of a dreamer thus dissolve or “lay low” conventional dualisms, for, to the question “What did you feel in really looking at that azalea flower?” the answer “I was successful,” does not make sense.

How might the person of convention cultivate the temperament of attending to the thickness of the world or respond to the experience of having their distinctions (e.g. successful/ unsuccessful) “laid low”? This is especially a challenge given that the professional classes, educated and cultured, “are trained to seek . . . the exquisite exclusively” such that they are “stuffed with abstract conceptions” and hence “grow stone-blind and insensible to life’s more elementary and general goods and joys.”⁴⁹ Robert Frost illustrates poignantly this insensibility: Not sensing or feeling becomes a habit such that a family cannot even mourn the loss of their young son; they merely return to their practices that make them successful. Death cannot be a foundation, cannot be built on, instrumentally: “No more to build on there. And they, since they / Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.”⁵⁰

James suggests a response to the blindness of the highly educated: “The remedy under such conditions is to descend to a more profound and primitive level.”⁵¹ By this he means a more full-bodied engagement, “seeing, smelling, tasting, sleeping, and daring.”⁵² This could also mean traveling widely, living in a way that breaks with one’s class, or painting with wider brushes—any “forms of interaction,” Craig expands, “that may thrust one outside of one’s comfort zone and disrupt one’s habitual patterns of looking and listening.”⁵³ Against the criticism that pragmatism features a one-sided, future-oriented focus on efficiency, I want to suggest that we can extend James’s “remedy” to a consideration of pace, or how quickly one moves in the world. To see and to sense, as opposed to living “blind” and insensibly, one must take one’s time. Against the inertia of previously formed beliefs, it takes time to change a habit of action. It takes time to learn to see a flower, really. Craig continues: “A culture built upon an idealization of speed and a single vision of success loses touch with less rigid and measurable possibilities for flourishing . . . forgetting the labors inherent in genuine thought.”⁵⁴ The consequences of this blindness are both social and epistemological. Just as exposure to others is limited in the workday drive, so too is attuning “to alternative means of communication, including bodily gesture, glances, nonlinear prose, painting, music, and poetry,” which one cannot develop when one is oriented toward “thin” personal and professional goals, as opposed to the thick sense of life that moves so vibrantly before one’s body.⁵⁵

James concludes both negatively and positively, cautioning us against equating something we find unintelligible with something meaningless, and urging that we “be faithful to [our] opportunities . . . without presuming to regulate the rest of the vast field” of experience.⁵⁶ This is to say that meaning and knowledge are perspectival, and thus James’s conclusion acknowledges social position. It moves to pluralism: a tolerance of difference and recognition of multiple meanings. Richard Bernstein comments that James’s is “an engaged pluralism,” not “flabby or sentimental,” but instead calling “for critical engagement with other points of view

and with other visions”; it demands “that we reach out to the points of contact where we can critically engage with each other.”⁵⁷ Craig adds, further, that this “emotional engagement” that is “fundamental to ethical attentiveness, to an expanding field of values and significance,” works in conjunction with James’s emphasis on action: “that emotion must be *exercised* rather than exorcised, for only in expanding the heart and honing a whole-bodied capacity for feeling does one stand any chance of expanding one’s mind.”⁵⁸

James throws the task—what I have described, following Bernstein and Craig, as moving toward a pluralistic, emotional engagement with others—back on the individual: To the greatest extent possible, avoid judging or managing or comprehending or otherwise “regulating” the lives of others. If this is a “seeing” in response to “blindness,” it is a sight that always locates itself. Perhaps if one spent the time it takes to compare others to one’s own standard instead in the common activity of co-perceiving and engaging in the thickness of a shared situation, one would be able to change one’s own habits away from convention and “success”—those “ballasts of equilibrium” in which one is comfortable.⁵⁹ Perhaps it is the drive to compare others to what one is right now that renders oneself static, lifeless, unable to unfold and change and grow. If I am walking to a morning meeting with my boots nicely tied, and I see a loafer with a ripped shirt and consider him unfashionable (always in reference to my own fashion as the standard), then I limit my own re-fashioning. To change my own habit, I could begin by refusing to regulate the habits of another. I can start to re-fashion my habits when I see differences not in comparison to me, but as other opportunities, modes of engagement, and in this sense, invitations.⁶⁰

In these discussions of practice, it is important to note that James presents two kinds of “blindness”: (1) a blindness inherent in humans, given that attention is always selective and therefore always “blind” to certain experiences, and (2) a “certain” blindness that results from self-referential and specialized habituation that fails to “see” the world from the perspective of others. My failure, in this second sense, also limits my own experience and vision. It is

a way of “rendering the world smaller and less vibrant,” such that, in response, “widening the scope of [my] emotions” would be a kind of engagement that “deepens [my] sense of reality.”⁶¹ This widening and deepening fosters an ethical responsibility to others and to a shared world when said responsibility is not individualistically claimed but verified among others, amidst the thickness. To attend sensually to the thickness of the world we find ourselves in, and which we are constantly re-making while re-making ourselves, is not just a way of facing the fact that life could be meaningless, but it is also to confront, as John Kaag puts it, “the ever-present chance to be largely responsible for its worth.”⁶² “Life is always worth living,” James writes, “if one have such responsive sensibilities.”⁶³ “The appropriate response to our existential situation is not, at least for James, utter despair or suicide,” Kaag continues, “but rather the repeated, ardent, yearning attempt to make good on life’s tenuous possibilities. And the possibilities are out there, often in the most unlikely places.”⁶⁴

CONCLUSION: TOWARD PRAGMATIC INTERRUPTION

How might one realize “the ethical significance of attending to multiple meanings in multiple forms?”⁶⁵ In response to this question, I propose two maxims. Before my proposals, however, let me own up to my writing by posing a question of audience: On whom am I calling to re-fashion their habits? Like James in “On a Certain Blindness,” I take myself to be writing primarily about the lives of the formally educated and conventionally successful. Because the thick environments in which we live are skewed oppressively, it is precisely these individuals who must take more responsibility for their habits. And if, as Fanon says, “[y]ou are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich,” then I am talking about a certain habituation of whiteness.⁶⁶ Making a point to white readers, George Yancy gives a helpful example: White people could seek out everyday situations in which their own racism “ambushes” them.⁶⁷ What I see as at stake in this essay is as follows: An interrogation of a habituation of whiteness, understood normatively, is required. The habituation of whiteness walls itself in

and shores itself up. By contrast, as Fanon writes, “[i]n the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence.”⁶⁸ If the maxims of my own writing can make any claim to ethics today, they must avoid any development of said “constant effort” and instead reverse the pathologization in “the effort . . . to scrutinize the self,” and by extension, what counts as success, what is affirmed as convention, and what is understood as a good or healthy environment, such that it is the “successful” who are put under scrutiny.⁶⁹

That said, my first maxim is: *Start with, and re-fashion, myself.* I should not begin the interactions I choose, and those in which I find myself, by presuming I can determine what is meaningful in the life of another. I can begin, instead, by training myself to attend to the more profound and primitive level of my own senses, on the ground, and out there in the unexpected places of richness that have been in front of me all along. I take this to be Emerson’s suggestion in his poem “Art”: “Hid in gleaming piles of stone; / On the city’s paved street . . . / Human sense doth overfill.”⁷⁰

Depending on my temperament, on my morning walk, I might consider how a leaf spins when it falls off an oak tree; not used to working with my hands, I could collaborate with local farmers, thereby sensing the soil present—and what harms and nourishes it—near the town in which I live; perhaps I would take time away from the screens that dominate my daily life so as to really listen to the everyday concerns of members of my kin.

Just as it is crucial to understand that James is calling for an embodied, sensual engagement, so too is it important to feel that this change in action is not a suspension of who I am but an engagement that departs (in both senses of this term) from my particular perspective. Here I recall Peirce’s critique of Cartesian skepticism. Peirce writes that one “sets out,” and can only set out, from “the very state of mind in which you actually find yourself . . . a state in which you are laden with an immense mass of cognition already formed, of which you cannot divest yourself.”⁷¹ I think a change of heart can also only set out from this point of departure. I cannot divest myself of who I am, a bundle of already formed habits of action. *And, I*

could engage differently, setting out in a slightly different direction, an incremental, and perhaps initially indiscernible, departure. If this is a negative moment, it is also a moment for growth: I am excited at the possibility of becoming, of becoming differently. This motion in different directions is part of what Craig calls “James’s pluriverse,” a place of “decentered subjectivity” in which, with others, “subjects remake themselves and are remade in light of new experiences.”⁷² *Pace* Hegel, for instance, this conception implies that changes in self are not necessarily oppositional and thus in need of overcoming; instead, they are differences that flow from one to another, like the water of a stream, to use a metaphor James frequently invokes. It seems to me, to employ a different metaphor, that a flower in bloom could be different from, *and* not against or in contradiction to, the seed it once was. Indeed, the bloom of a flower is part of a process of growth. My first maxim has focused on a kind of willed action. It might be noted that the activities I suggested, like really seeing a flower, take time that some do not have, given their need to work multiple jobs or otherwise support those around them. This raises a question about *how*, *under what social conditions*, or *in what environments* one could work to remake oneself and one’s *ethos*. My second maxim will consider more carefully the context in which such doing, suffering, and creating occurs.

The second maxim is: *Travel passionately*. I do not mean travel in the sense of the tourist who uses his American Express card to secure a stay at the Marriott in Guadalajara, speaks English throughout his time in Mexico, wakes up at 7:00 a.m. sharp (as the workday dictates), and so on. That is a kind of travel that never leaves home. Conversely, there is a kind of staying home that is traveling—engaging the local from where one sets out—in the sense I intend. I mean to suggest the root meaning of “travel,” not only the “journey” of the French *travail*, but also the “toil, labor, or painful effort.” That is, to travel in this way is difficult, a continual effort to engage with other visions. It is to place myself in different contexts or conditions—different conversations—such that my current habits of action are challenged, no longer working with ease or efficiency. Passion here suggests being shaken not by a God or an “event” so

much as being moved mundanely to live more lovingly and varyingly in that very world, less in a grand gesture of transcendence, more enmeshed with others in the banal situation of the bus, classroom, DMV line, or walking on a paved street in the city where I find myself.

Again, who can afford to travel in this way, or who has the time needed to see a flower really? Bills are due, kin must be cared for, and life is enough of a struggle with one's current set of habits intact. What personal or social resources do people need to travel thus? How can people conduct this travel, given the hold of habits and customs? Social arrangements and environments could be more conducive to the habit of re-habitation: Beyond the individual choice not to contribute to the gentrification of a neighborhood or to belong to a certain country club, social policy that eliminates redlining and other discriminatory lending, as well as gender- or sexuality-based discrimination generally, is needed. Both individual and structural or environmental considerations can foster engagement with those I see as different from me, an important step toward the ethical significance of attending to pluralistic meanings.

Let me close with an example at the intersection of habituation and environment. In Minnesota, where I am from, a system of skyways connects sixty-nine blocks of downtown Minneapolis. While most Minnesotans take these skyways as a natural response to the cold winter weather, the city constructed them, in fact, in order to raise property values; real estate developers were concerned that flight to the suburbs would decrease demand for downtown spaces. Today, these skyways allow wealthy employees to drive to work from suburban neighborhoods (where they pay taxes, and hence that have up-to-date public schools), park underground or in a private ramp, and walk indoors largely among other corporate employees. I have long marveled at the stylish, polished shoes of these professionals, especially in the winter months, given the snow-covered streets outside. Such footwear exists only because these professionals quite literally never have to touch the ground. The design of the urban architecture ensures it would be unnecessary and inefficient to descend—indeed deign—to the more profound, cold,

elemental, and external level below. Here we recall that Whitman's location for poetic insight was the streetcar, a form of public transportation. Not only the individual choice to take the bus and walk outside, but also the environmental decision to eliminate the skyway system, or to barricade skyways every two or three blocks, as the architect Jan Gehl has suggested, would militate against the social hierarchies—with some literally moving above others—the skyways promote.⁷³ The more vital, ground-level street life would be conducive to passionate travel. Daily contacts with difference, in the thickness of urban life—multiple languages, fashions, kinship units, and ways of moving through space—as well as the natural varieties of experience that a climate-controlled space disallows—the wind against my face, the door I hold open so that another can enter the warm space before me, the city employee tending to the sidewalk planters I must step around—all are part of contexts conducive to an interruption in my experience, a space in which my habits might break down, and that, if I am listening really, suggest to me an alternative habituation.

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NOTES

¹ Craig, "Habit," 176.

² Colapietro, "Customary Reflection and Innovative Habits," 170.

³ James, *The Principles*, 109.

⁴ James, 110.

⁵ Cf. Aristotle's presentation of the soul as "wax," as impressionable; some experiences imprint the soul with marks of differing depths and shallowness. Particularly painful or joyful experiences carve deeper impressions, as it were, thus limiting future plasticity. Thanks to Megan Craig for guiding me to this insight.

⁶ Craig, "Habit," 175.

⁷ Craig, *Levinas and James*, 107.

⁸ James, *The Principles*, 117.

⁹ James, 119.

¹⁰ James, 120.

¹¹ James, 123.

¹² James, 123.

¹³ James, 125.

¹⁴ James, 125. Because the inertia of habit is socially circumscribing, what is partially at stake in this essay is a way to loosen the ties that habit tightens on individuals so that they stay in their place, or so that they take

on or stay within prescribed, procrustean roles. In regard to habits on the level of society, if customs are, as Dewey says, “widespread uniformities of habit,” then the pragmatic project includes addressing those social habits by turning not only to individuals but also to institutions and environments (Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 43). As Michael Sullivan explains, “Rather than being controlled by habit and custom, we must strive toward the intelligent control of habit. This involves criticizing current institutions and finding ways to reconstruct them” (Sullivan, *Legal Pragmatism*, 57). Thus, the pragmatic project, in the case of the individual and the institution, is both negative and positive, critical and reconstructive.

¹⁵ James, *The Principles*, 125.

¹⁶ James, 126.

¹⁷ Charlene Haddock Seigfried notes that these ages, for James, are not gender neutral: James thought by twenty the habits of women were essentially fixed, while those of men were still developing (Seigfried, “The Feminine-Mystical Threat,” 50.)

¹⁸ James, *The Principles*, 127. Certain energy is required for this “launch.” Given that energies are distributed differently across societies, that there are structural injustices that affect daily comportments, a democratic and not simply individualistic consideration of launching would require an attention to equality—in terms of shelter, safety, food security, and so on.

¹⁹ James, *The Principles*, 127.

²⁰ James, 128.

²¹ James, 129.

²² James, 129-130.

²³ James, 129-130.

²⁴ There is a New England puritanism at play here; the Harvard professor’s habit-reforming cold shower presupposes a habituation of warm showers. As I will elaborate upon later in the essay, this is an ethics directed at those whose agency is socially supported more than those whose agency is socially diminished, threatened, suffocated.

²⁵ James, *The Principles*, 129-130.

²⁶ Craig, *Levinas and James*, 109. Emphasis mine.

²⁷ Koopman, “The Will,” 500. This distance granted, I have learned from Koopman’s connection of habits to ethics in James: “Self-

transformation, for James, is an ethics for conducting ourselves in the midst of uncertainty, chance, risk, and indeterminacy. These are, one might presume, the situations where morality matters most” (Koopman, 508).

²⁸ Craig, *Levinas and James*, 93. Emphasis mine.

²⁹ James has said that whereas modern philosophy is a philosophy of the eye, pragmatism is a philosophy of the hand: It follows that truth and meaning, for example, are not found but made, not seen but built.

³⁰ James, “On a Certain Blindness,” 132.

³¹ James, 132. Of course, this language of “blindness” is rightly called into question by thinkers of (dis)ability today.

³² James, 132.

³³ James, 132. Richard Bernstein elaborates on the consequences of our “blindness” beyond interactions between two individuals: “There are much more threatening instances of this phenomenon when we come face to face with religious, ethnic, racial, and gender intolerance” (Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 62).

³⁴ James, “On a Certain Blindness,” 133.

³⁵ James, *The Principles*, 220.

³⁶ James, “On a Certain Blindness,” 134.

³⁷ James, 134.

³⁸ James, 134.

³⁹ James, 138.

⁴⁰ James, 138.

⁴¹ James, “The Will to Believe,” 29. It is remarkable how James’s written style—vague, impressionistic, and passionate—performs this insight.

⁴² James, “On a Certain Blindness,” 139.

⁴³ Craig, *Levinas and James*, 94.

⁴⁴ Brueggemann, “Response: Dwelling in the Thickness,” 179.

⁴⁵ See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*; Badiou, *Being and Event*.

⁴⁶ Lachs, “Human Blindness.” In a world of instrumental reason, there are social consequences to living more passionately, including that one becomes less legible or intelligible to others. Indeed, for James there is a correlation between having insight and being deemed socially “worthless”; such an insightful individual could be a prophet but not “a worldly success” (James, “On a Certain Blindness,” 141).

⁴⁷ Emerson, “The American Scholar,” 68.

⁴⁸ James, “On a Certain Blindness,” 141.

⁴⁹ James, 146.

⁵⁰ Frost, “Out, Out.”

⁵¹ James, “On a Certain Blindness,” 146.

⁵² James, 146.

⁵³ Craig, “Habit,” 170. That is, there is not yet an explicit politics to the ethical habituation I am describing.

⁵⁴ Craig, 173.

⁵⁵ Craig, 173.

⁵⁶ James, “On a Certain Blindness,” 149.

⁵⁷ Bernstein, *Pragmatic Turn*, 62. This is not to say that each group has a static position or sense of meaning. Bernstein continues, “James was especially insightful about the dangers of reification—the dangers of thinking that groups have fixed identities. He was acutely aware of how identities change, develop, and mutate in the course of history. He was never sentimental about blindly celebrating differences. He was just as concerned with searching for commonalities that can bind us together” (Bernstein, 69).

⁵⁸ Craig, *Levinas and James*, 109.

⁵⁹ Craig, 107.

⁶⁰ To frame a habit of forming new habits as a habit of re-fashioning is to allow for differences that “need not necessarily be understood as disagreements and disputes and discords” (Stuhr, *Pragmatic Fashions*, 42). “Fashion,” suggesting both what and how a way of living is expressed, is different from “style,” which suggests just the what (not the how) and the form (not the content or substance) (Stuhr, 36). “Fashion,” then, like “experience,” is what John Dewey will call “double-barreled,” including both what is experienced and how it is experienced.

⁶¹ Craig, *Levinas and James*, 94, 106.

⁶² Kaag, *American Philosophy*, 8-9. In regard to taking up James’s fashion in writing, it is worth noting that Kaag performs this commentary not in an exegetical essay but in a personal novel. This is in line with Mary Oliver’s observation: “Writing is neither vibrant life nor docile artifact but a text that puts all its money on the hope of suggestion. *Come with me into a field of sunflowers* is a better line than anything you will find here, and the sunflowers themselves far more wonderful than any words about

them” (Oliver, *Upstream*, 22). For me, this means that writing, as a sign or a gesture, is more effective when more affective, more inviting when more personal, as Oliver’s invitation (and James’s emphasis on thought being owned) shows. Lived actions will likely inspire more than words. This essay is likely not as persuasive as a friend’s voice.

⁶³ James, “On a Certain Blindness,” 146.

⁶⁴ Kaag, *American Philosophy*, 9.

⁶⁵ Kaag, 93.

⁶⁶ Fanon, *Wretched*, 5.

⁶⁷ Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, 229.

⁶⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 43.

⁶⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 43, 181.

⁷⁰ Emerson, *Essays & Lectures*, 429.

⁷¹ Peirce, *The Essential Peirce*, 336.

⁷² Craig, “Habit,” 183.

⁷³ Berg, “Urban Designers.”

THE FESTIVAL OF SAN LÁZARO AND WILLIAM JAMES: FOUR KINDS OF FIELDWORK

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William James is almost exclusively treated in terms of his thought, an approach at odds with his own writing, which he always immersed in his own experience. The present paper asks about the relation of William James's writings to that experience and it examines his experience as "fieldwork," proposing that four different kinds of fieldwork are integral to James's work.

The paper illustrates the usefulness of Jamesian fieldwork through a visit to the Festival of San Lázaro, a celebration in Hialeah, Florida that is simultaneously focused on the Catholic saint and on his Santería double, Babalú-Ayé. Jamesian fieldwork makes that festival valuable, even for one not a student of that tradition.



The Festival of San Lázaro takes place yearly on December 17. One of the largest celebrations takes place in Hialeah, Florida, a largely Spanish-speaking city near Miami, populated principally by Cuban immigrants. Thousands of the devout congregate at a shrine called Rincón de San Lázaro to give offerings of flowers that pile more than six feet from the floor and must be removed periodically lest they collapse in a soft-petaled avalanche. The faithful, most dressed in purple or yellow, the colors of the saint, line up and patiently wait to kneel and light a candle. Some are barefoot in penitence, some come on crutches or in wheelchairs, and some crawl to the shrine from a considerable distance in extreme penance, for the devout see San Lázaro as a healer. On the evening of the festival in 2016, the throng processed through the streets of Hialeah for an hour or more, the police stopping traffic as the devout followed a large and vividly depicted statue of the saint, himself on crutches, marked by sores, and accompanied by two dogs.¹

Thus described, the scene isn't far different from those festivals depicted by Robert Orsi or other anthropologists of religion in Little Italy in New York or other ethnic Catholic neighborhoods.² What makes the San Lázaro Festival distinct from most of what Orsi studies is the fact that San Lázaro is simultaneously a Catholic saint and a Santería *orisha*, Babalú-Ayé, who is experienced as the embodiment of healing power by those in the tradition. Hidden within or behind the Catholic saint is the *ashe* of the West African spirit brought by slaves to the New World in the hulls of the slave ships, the *ashe* of healing, in this case, one that those in the unthinkably horrific passage much needed and that is, of course, needed in the current day, as well. To one raised in a more mainstream Catholic tradition in the United States, such as myself, there is a certain familiarity when it comes to statues of the saints and the devotion to otherworldly powers depicted in a multi-sensory manner. Dramatic scenes of suffering utilizing vivid colors and pungent smells, as well as communal chanting and singing, and an embodied immersion in the encounter with the holy—all of that was part of my pre-Vatican II childhood.³ I find the vivid sensory drama

both familiar, and yet strange, for while my experience of it goes back to my childhood, it also contains a power sufficiently out of the everyday to make the word “otherworldly” seem apt. And yet. The strangeness of the San Lázaro Festival does not simply multiply in comparison with my own experience, it’s *qualitatively* different because what the people parade through the streets with, make offerings to, and pray before is a spirit *not* of my experience but a potent *orisha* that applies severe and valuable pressure on my very sense of “otherworldly.”

Add to all of that the fact that I am a professor of religion, and the situation is a mixture and not a compound. That is to say, we might expect that I simply may apply the skills and experience I have accumulated through many years of studying religion to a new situation: I’ve understood *this*, and now I understand *that*. In our usual view, it’s as though we apply old knowledge to a new substance to create a fresh compound of knowledge, reliably within the molecular bonds of understanding; but that is not, I believe, the case. It’s a crucial aspect of our understanding today that context matters, and thus, the knower and the known are highly variable. As a result, understanding can be—and perhaps even should be—very unstable.

I generally study texts and not festivals, so that is one aspect of my reaction to the peculiar mixture of the San Lázaro Festival. Another is the African dimensions of the event, not to mention the context of slavery, the socio-economic environment of San Lázaro’s worship in the Americas, and the multiethnic identities of those who found his presence in Hialeah (for those at the Festival were not only Afro-Cuban Americans but Latino-Americans, and, I believe, Haitian-Americans, no doubt among many others). For many reasons, I would not (and could not) simply carry my well-burnished PhD and tenured professorship to the Festival and some months later publish the pure salt of a peer-reviewed article of knowledge. What I present here is a mixture. That’s not to say that if it’s *not* solid, pure knowledge, it’s just something loose and worthless, individual elements rolling around in a sack without encountering each other. Instead, I hope that as my religious knowledge mixes with the San

Lázaro Festival, useful encounters occur—chipping and bumping, some useful *change* in all of the elements. And that is, I believe, a good enough metaphor for knowledge: fresh friction of some value.

I draw a lot of my inspiration as a student of religion from William James, and the principle friction that results from my visit to the San Lázaro Festival is that it forces me to reflect on what it means to study for James, including using him to study religion. What I wonder about is the place of fieldwork in James studies. Something very much like fieldwork is integral to James, and he lets us know why we need to engage in that sort of study—not that we *may* but that we *must*. *William James Studies*, which has published work on James since 2006, contains no ethnographic studies. No one visits a community, no one participates in religious practices, no one encounters or immerses themselves in unfamiliar rituals or meets people who make claims of experience significantly foreign to those of the academy. The articles in the journal are overwhelmingly philosophical. And we might expect nothing else, for James is a *thinker*, right? He provides us with the theory of pragmatism or with theories of truth, with an ethics, and with early contributions to phenomenology and psychology. But the generalization that James is, above all, a thinker, is simply inaccurate. It's just how we've used him, predominantly. Those with a philosophical bent are attracted to him and find much to value, but James also did fieldwork and included it in his studies. Not only can we go to the San Lázaro Festival with William James, but I would insist that we *must* attend such festivals, broadly conceived, in order to be truly Jamesian.

James Clifford points out that ethnography was a product of the late nineteenth century when “down-close, empirical, and interactive” work was presumed necessary “to put theory to the test: it would *ground* interpretation.”⁴ So the affinity of James with ethnography brings him back to his own time. Nonetheless, we'll find Clifford's fluid sense of the boundaries of ethnography of great value when we consider James as a kind of ethnographer, as the traditional qualities of fieldwork are “an especially deep, extended, and interactive research encounter.”⁵ An “act of physically *going out* into a *cleared place of work*” is also necessary.⁶ In addition, we

do not achieve “depth” simply by “passing through” but by “physical, interpersonal interaction with a distinct, often exotic world.”⁷ These are the qualities we need to keep in mind as we consider whether James does fieldwork and whether fieldwork is integral to his ideas and his practice. We can’t ignore the fact that ethnography involves an *ethnos*, a “folk, people, or nation,” and the culture of such a group—and, with one crucial exception, James does not himself study groups with distinct cultures.⁸ But James most definitely does value fieldwork because theories are both tested in and subjected to a broader, non-theoretical experience. In fact, James’s sense of experience can approach and perhaps include what ethnography itself includes. In those senses, James was an ethnographer of a kind, and if we are Jamesian, we *must* engage in fieldwork.

In 1996, Michael Jackson urged the relevance of a Jamesian phenomenology for anthropology.⁹ Jackson states that “[m]any contemporary anthropologists have expressed dissatisfaction with the arcane, abstract, and alienating character of much theoretical thought.” What we need, he says, is

detailed descriptions of lived reality [which can serve] as ways of resisting the estranging effects of conceptual models and systematic explanation which, when pushed too far, disqualify and efface the very life one wants to understand.¹⁰

James serves as a resource for Jackson because of three of his qualities: He is acutely aware of and points out the weaknesses of the “intellectual fallacy” that presumes ideas are all that matter; he recommends we pay attention to the holism of our experience, in his radical empiricism and elsewhere, with a broad sense of experience; and he argues for a pragmatic instead of a realist evaluation of our broadly experiential theories. I would argue that James offers a justification for fieldwork as a *necessary* complement to theorizing. But how does James do fieldwork?

James is far from opposed to theories: His books *are* theories (though it’s crucial to notice that they’re not *only* theories). What he

fights against is the notion that we will ever have a final version of what's true. Instead, he sees a theory as "a program for more work."¹¹ There is no last word. We cannot rest. Rejecting a copy theory of truth—which means we can simply come up with a static and final answer—our theorizing must instead remain provisional, and we must always test it against experience, because our theories are always a part of our greater experiencing. That is the most important aspect for the relevance of ethnography. In James's memorable phrase, we must put our ideas "at work within the stream of [our] experience."¹² I would claim that stream of experiencing roughly equals fieldwork.

We must test our ideas to see how well they handle the fullness (and relative chaos) of our experiencing, according to whatever interests we might have. For Jackson, intellectuals must undercut the pretense that they have reached a fully adequate and final insight into human behavior, for there is a "'natural failing' of intellectuals to exaggerate the significance of their theoretical knowledge."¹³ As James puts it,

When the first mathematical, logical and natural uniformities, the first *laws*, were discovered, men were so carried away by the clearness, beauty and simplification that resulted, that they believed themselves to have deciphered authentically the eternal thoughts of the Almighty.¹⁴

If ideas are removed from experience, they've lost their truth. They haven't gained timelessness.¹⁵

We might debate whether all theorizing assumes the same finality as Jackson and James assert, and, in fact, the dominant views of theorizing these days acknowledge fallibility and context dependency which make finality impossible—yet most theories make do with simply encountering other theories. One reads multiple works in a small field; one submits to peer review that asks whether one has read the most relevant articles and books; one's article has to run the gauntlet of others with contrasting or competing views. It's generally theory versus theory in a rationalist world, and

the presumption is that a world of multiple theories is all we need in a marketplace of ideas. Jackson (and James) disagree.¹⁶

The counterforce to theory for Jackson is not just other theories (even in contestation) but “life as lived.”¹⁷ What he means is

that domain of everyday, immediate social existence and practical activity, with all its habituality, its crises, its vernacular and idiomatic character, its biographical particularities, its decisive events and indecisive strategies. . . .¹⁸

James’s radical empiricism, which “include[s] the plurality of *all* experienced facts” is similar both in its plurality and in its treatment of all experience “on the same existential footing,” rather than a privileging of the rational.¹⁹ Jackson cites from James the “conjunctive and disjunctive, fixed and fluid, social and personal, theoretical and practical, subjective and objective, mental and physical, real and illusory,” as the breadth of experience that would benefit theory.²⁰

Clifford emphasizes the importance of “going out,” which involves “a spatial distinction between a home base and an exterior place of discovery.”²¹ I don’t think we can always find a spatial movement in James, though sometimes we can, and Jackson doesn’t ask for one. Rather, “going out” involves exposing our ideas to the effects of a broader experience, the experience of the second half of the pairs he cites from James—the disjunctive, fluid, personal, practical, illusory, and others—when we usually desire the first of the pairs in a definite, clear, generalizable, and real-seeming theory. Those are our academic homes. But we need to “go out” from our offices, from the home of our conceptualizing that, we usually think, works best if we close the door and eliminate all distractions. And neither James nor Jackson entirely disagrees with our usual preference, for clear, precise ideas are very valuable and hard to achieve (which we realize both when we teach and when we write), but they believe we still need to “go out” with those ideas, both physically and mentally, to test them in the disjunctive, the fluid, and the practical (how well do they make sense of the “stream of our

experiencing”) *and*, even more important, to subject them to that stream. To test them and to subject them to the effects of what James calls “weather.”²² To change them as we discover the valuable ways in which they fail. For it’s not equality that Jackson is after—that the theoretical and the experiential are equally valuable—rather, he privileges the “power to destabilize and unsettle received ways of seeing the world.”²³ What he urges is the “prioritizing of lived experience over theoretical knowledge.”²⁴ Jackson advocates a Clifford-like “going out” into experience, and one that is far enough from our “homes” that we can have a “deep, extended, and interactive” experience.²⁵

A more careful account of the relation of theory to “lived experience,” or to a term she likes better, “concrete experience,” appears in Charlene Haddock Seigfried’s *William James’s Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*.²⁶ Seigfried says that “[t]he rational explanations of philosophy, which privilege the articulate, are still rooted in the pre-reflective world of experience.”²⁷ That is to say, our concepts are within a whole that is rich and multifarious, “an aboriginal flow of feelings” that is “always much-at-once.”²⁸ This is what James refers to as the “rich thicket of reality,” along with many other pungent and vivid images.²⁹ The two dangers that concern Seigfried are “sterility” and the essentializing of ideas. Both come about when we remove our coherent thoughts from concrete experience, and we can remedy both by subjecting those ideas to concrete experience. What Seigfried sees in James is a “radical reconstruction” as he places ideas within “concrete experience.”³⁰ What she and James both want is a therapeutic treatment for theory by the effect of concrete experience, and I would suggest not only that fieldwork can perform this treatment, but, more strongly, that we can consider the therapeutic treatment for theories as fieldwork.

Seigfried is certainly right when she sees concrete experience as central in James, as well as how that experience relates to theorizing, for theory is a valuable process but one in need of the input from broader and messier experience. Many of James’s most striking and least philosophical expressions are his depictions of concrete experience. He claims that pragmatism, like empiricism, “can

preserve the richest intimacy with facts” and that those facts are “multitudinous beyond imagination, tangled, muddy, painful and perplexed.”³¹ Experience can be “intolerably confused and gothic,” yet, in spite of what we might gather from the use of the term “facts,” James’s description presents something he isn’t simply passively compelled to acknowledge. Rather, he selects “rich thicket of reality,” as the term “rich” indicates, because it is *valuable* to him.³²

As Seigfried points out so well, while we need to organize our worlds (“weaving chaos into order,” according to a variety of interests), we need to remember that the theory is a theory only and, crucially, to critique and vitalize those theories.³³ As she says, quoting James, “our finite world, which is abstracted out of the concrete fullness of experience, is always less than, and therefore often a ‘rotten or miserable substitute’ for the encompassing reality.”³⁴ Even if our ideas about the world are productive ones, they’re still in need of revitalizing.

I would suggest that we can encounter the “concrete fullness of experience,” that “rich thicket of reality,” with some success, through fieldwork. More boldly, I want to ask whether that encounter with the rich thicket might itself be considered fieldwork. For one thing, our experience out of the refinement of our theoretical texts is personal, multisensory, embodied, social, and, sometimes, public. Yes, a book is tactile and its letters are black and the spaces white, but none of that compares to the sensory experiences of the San Lázaro Festival. After all, when James says concrete experience is “multitudinous beyond imagination, tangled, muddy, painful and perplexed,” he’s describing the street—“The world of concrete experience to which the *street* belongs.”³⁵ James encounters the “much-at-once” in the street, at least to a significant degree. James’s concreteness is poetic, for while “multitudinous” is an abstraction, the rest of his terms are vivid and concrete, and they convey the experience of the thoroughfare in his day with its tangled vegetation and muddy, unsteady traction, and with the physical and emotional consequence (“painful and perplexed”) of the “too muchness” of the street. James’s study, with its large windows in his house on Irving Street in Cambridge, was the place of his thought (and of the

composition of all his writings post-1889), but the street was the world, and a very chaotic and valuable complement to that study of thinking.

But there are several kinds of “concrete fullness of experience” in James, and while each dovetails in ways with Clifford’s sense of ethnography, they do so unequally. There is the “too muchness” of the external world in some chapters of *The Principles of Psychology* and elsewhere; the “too muchness” of the internal world in *The Principles*; the “too muchness” of the social and literary worlds in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; and the “too muchness” of sub-cultures that were strange to him in his psychic research. Each benefits James’s theorizing in different ways and will benefit our own, too, if we are really to be Jamesian.

JAMES’S FIRST FIELDWORK

To begin, the imagery James uses in *The Principles of Psychology* to illustrate the external world “depicts a rich whirl of raw materials in which we cannot live, but that not only enables us to live but stimulates us constantly to live better by making our constructions more adequate to its fullness.”³⁶ James writes that “[w]hat we experience, what *comes before us*, is a chaos of fragmentary impressions interrupting each other.”³⁷ It is a “black and jointless continuity of space and moving clouds of swarming atoms.”³⁸ It is a “plenum,” utterly full.³⁹

It’s not exactly a “going out” that takes place, for we can’t reside there. There’s something inhuman about it, and, in fact, James notes that we want to “get away from it as fast as possible.”⁴⁰ “The condition of [our] mental sanity” requires that most of the “utter chaos . . . of actual experience . . . should become nonexistent.”⁴¹ Nonetheless, we benefit from the pressure of that “too muchness,” so we need to experience its effects and be open to it; otherwise we will have the sterility and essentialism that Siegfried points to. The “too muchness” provides the “power to destabilize and unsettle received ways,” as Jackson says.⁴² In addition, the plenum has aspects of the “distinct, often exotic, world” that Clifford sees in fieldwork, for it is certainly *other* than the selections of our

concepts.⁴³ Clifford distinguishes fieldwork from tourism, defined as a kind of travel “incapable of producing serious knowledge,” but I don’t think we can say James sees our encounters with the plenum as in any way superficial, in spite of the fact that we don’t take up residence.⁴⁴ As for the “deep, extended, and interactive” encounter fieldwork provides, I think we can, with some generosity, apply all of the characteristics to our experience of the plenum. In fact, those adjectives are all crucial characteristics of the plenum. “Deep” is a fuzzy term, but the plenum seems to qualify eminently. Whatever science has said of nature, from Ptolemy to Newton to Einstein to string theory, the world supports all of it, but there is more that can and will be said. It is that “more” that is the benefit of the plenum’s fullness. We might see the encounter with the plenum as both a “No” and a “More,” somewhat as postmodern thinkers see *differance* within discourse. Without the concrete experience of the too muchness of our experience of the world, we feel as though our theories are sufficient. As Jackson says, we “exaggerate the significance of . . . theoretical knowledge,” or, as Seigfried says, we essentialize.⁴⁵ But subjected to the plenum of concrete experience, those discourses destabilize and fail. Crucially, in addition, the plenum revitalizes our theories. They’re richer, they’re *more*, because of being subjected to experience. I think we’re justified, then, in seeing our encounter with the plenum as serving the role of fieldwork, even if we might not be ready to call it ethnography.

In an introduction to religion course, for many years I taught Joseph Murphy’s *Santeria: African Spirits in America*, and what struck me principally was how “wholly other” the world of the spirits was, in accord with theories of religion from Otto to Eliade to Tillich to the postmodernists. In presenting the *orishas* and his ethnographic encounter with them, Murphy writes about the importance of stones, “alive with the *orisha’s ashe*,” or power.⁴⁶ “As embodiments of the *orishas*, the stones must be treated as the living things they are, and so they are lovingly bathed in cooling herbs, cleaned and oiled, and fed with the blood of animals.”⁴⁷ I led my students through a careful consideration of Murphy’s description. “What is usually bathed and cleaned,” I asked? “Babies, right? And

they're oiled with baby oil, too. And fed, right? Spoon fed. See how intimate the *orishas* are? And then they're fed with . . . the blood of animals!"—I'd conclude in triumphant climax, proving that the *orishas* are otherworldly, and in a dramatically disruptive way. Do we think we can understand the divine? Absolutely not. Like Otto's *mysterium tremendum*, Eliade's sacred, and Tillich's ultimate concern to varying degrees, the *orishas* are, in Derrida's expression, an absolute interruption.⁴⁸

But there is a problem with my theory, a theory with a long pedigree in the study of religion. I discovered it in 2001, when Murphy and I visited communities of practitioners in Santiago de Cuba and Matanzas in Cuba, and I encountered it again at the San Lázaro Festival in Hialeah. Disturbance isn't all that's going on. Yes, while at a *bembe*, a drumming celebration centered around the appearance of *orishas*, I saw a man sway and writhe in a way that made it seem like something "other" was overpowering him when he went into a trance. Yes, too, when Murphy and I attended a day devoted to animal sacrifice in the seven-day initiation called an *asiento*, the man whose head was being "seated" with an *orisha*—which involved anointing his head with the fresh blood of numerous animals—looked utterly dazed. But more was going on here than just disruption, because those present at the *bembe* also delighted in the appearance of the spirits. The manifestation of the spirit seemed more to confirm hopes and expectations than to disrupt them. Those praying at the Rincón de San Lázaro in December 2016, and processing through the streets, seemed variously serious, determined, joyous, fervent, and relieved. More existed here than my neat theoretical preoccupation with disturbance had prepared me for. In the expression from James that Seigfried makes much of, there was "much-at-once," and even the list of adjectives in my previous sentence is selective.⁴⁹ I selected "serious, determined, joyous, fervent, and relieved" because they harmonize with what I know of religion and with the plenum of the Festival, but on another visit I might amend that list. I hope I would.

Seigfried points out that our reasonings have limitations due to the interests that motivate them but that a remedy exists for the

partiality in reasoning: an awareness of how limited our interests are and, even more crucially, the experience of reverie or contemplation. “We must have the creative moment of free association in order to multiply the chances that some fortuitous coupling will arise. . . .”⁵⁰ That is the benefit of fieldwork of the first kind, within the “much-at-once” of the plenum, though, in my case, at the San Lázaro Festival, it consisted of the social and not the physical universe. William James’s plenum was saying “no” to my theory derived from Otto, Tillich, Eliade, and the rest, and I was able to add “more” impressions to help myself suggest ideas that might be more adequate to the San Lázaro Festival. And I would need to refresh my new ideas on another visit to the Festival, and then, yet again, because the plenum is always more.

While the fieldwork I describe in parallel with James’s experience of the plenum has clear value in relativizing and vitalizing our theories, we might ask more from the term “fieldwork.” It’s not really ethnographic. There is no ethnos, no people or culture or customs. The plenum certainly fulfills Jackson’s recommendation for a counterforce to theory, due to the “no” and “more” from this sort of fieldwork. And the experience of failure is invaluable, and it’s one I’m glad I experienced at the San Lázaro Festival. But justifiable use of the term “fieldwork” might require more of the multisensory, embodied, social, and public, and for those we need to look at other manifestations of James’s “concrete fullness of experience.”

JAMES’S SECOND FIELDWORK

As opposed to the plenum, the inner world that James depicts in *The Principles of Psychology* is thoroughly human. It is far from the “black and jointless continuity of space and moving clouds of swarming atoms” in which we cannot live.⁵¹ It is suffused with personality, one of the five characteristics of consciousness. As he says, “the universal conscious fact is not ‘feelings and thoughts exist,’ but ‘I think’ and ‘I feel.’”⁵² And it’s important to notice James doesn’t just say that each feeling or thought has the “tag” of “I” attached but that “every thought tends to be part of a personal

consciousness,” for “the personal self rather than the thought might be treated as the immediate datum in psychology.”⁵³ Our mind is a personality, but it’s also very rich and broad, and analogous to the plenum, for it is also a “teeming multiplicity” of objects and relations.⁵⁴ Significantly, James must use images to convey consciousness, for delineating it with precise and exact rational concepts is not adequate.⁵⁵ And so he provides the very influential stream of consciousness, the similarly natural metaphor of the flights and perchings of thought, and a grammatical metaphor of the mental reality of all parts of speech, not just nouns and verbs, but propositions and conjunctions, adverbs and adjectives, as well. Each metaphor conveys that the self is full and also indeterminate.

It’s important to notice that James still sees the mind as composed significantly of ideas, if only in part—the “perchings” of our mental activity, and the nouns. James’s own writing is a fine example. He makes an argument, and he does so with logical force, using concepts that are clear and distinct—again, at least in part. He does his best to make each of his five characteristics of consciousness (it is personal, always changing, continuous, concerned with objects, and always interested) clear to readers and to persuade them of their accuracy. But he also argues that the mind is more than its concepts, for it is awash in “numberless relations.”⁵⁶ It’s that “free water of consciousness” that’s analogous to the plenum, and it’s our participation in *that* experience which comprises the second sort of fieldwork.⁵⁷

What is in that “free water of consciousness”? James says it’s hard to be aware of it, for we tend to emphasize the definite, the nouns of our thought, the objects in our experiencing, and not the context or the relations among concepts. But, for one thing, our accumulated experience affects each definite thought, so our impressions of objects change. “The friends we used to care the world for are shrunken to shadows; . . . the pictures so empty; and as for the books, what *was* there so mysteriously significant in Goethe, or in John Mill so full of weight?”⁵⁸ Context is crucial, as is our physical state (“We feel things differently according as we are sleepy or awake, hungry or full, fresh or tired. . . .”).⁵⁹ Even what

seems to be utterly distinct, like a clap of thunder, is felt *in relation* to the silence that came before, and differently if there had been a prior rumble of thunder.⁶⁰ Perhaps because of my greater affinity for language than for thunder, what James says of grammar seems to communicate his point especially well: “We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue* or a feeling of *cold*.”⁶¹ All of those non-substantial, relational words are part of the free water of our experiencing, and the relations within our minds “are numberless.”⁶²

I have spent so much space discussing this free water of consciousness because James spends so much time on it in *The Principles*, and because it is such a crucial instance of the kind of fieldwork I have been discussing. James says he wants to reinstate this multitude of “anonymous psychic states” to their “proper place in our mental life,” but why? It’s not, I think, an attempt to be accurate and realistic, but because this “too muchness” is so valuable. We need to experience it, as Clifford says of fieldwork, so we “go out” from our usual worlds into “a distinct, often exotic world” and there encounter something “deep, extended, [and] interactive” that can “ground interpretation.”⁶³ Since James feels we commonly ignore the vast majority of what goes on in our minds, the free water of consciousness is certainly a ‘place’ into which we need to “go out.” We can see its exoticism—or strangeness, a better term—by looking at the modernist novels of Virginia Woolf or James Joyce, for they present very strange internal worlds influenced by James’s stream of consciousness. Moreover, the Jamesian stream is certainly deep—“the relations are numberless”—and James wants our encounter with it to be extended and interactive. In fact, interaction with it is the very point, and that has to do with how it “grounds” our ideas.

I want to pay special attention to the “grounding” of interpretation, not in the sense of giving a solid foundation for our ideas but as providing something as sensory, personal, and experiential as the dirty ground under our shoes. James’s own manner of writing shows us the value of the “free water of

consciousness.” To an unusual degree in modern academic writing, James fills his *textbook* with a great deal of his own stream of consciousness to drench his arguments with the “free water” of *him*.⁶⁴ His ideas *are related* to his multitude of experiences. *The Principles* contains frequent examples that strike me as very personal to James. When he says that our experience of the note of the piano key, the green of grass, and the scent of cologne never repeats, those examples seem actually drawn from James’s own experience, as do his examples of how being sleepy, hungry, or tired affect perception, or how time affects affection for friends, literature, and philosophy. I bet that James really did lose regard for Goethe and John Stuart Mill and that he really did recall “[putting his] nose to the . . . flask of cologne” when he wrote the sentence. James may not be confessional, but he is personal.⁶⁵ Readers see him associating his own experiences with his theories, and in this way, James’s thoughts are “grounded.” We can’t eliminate this ground in order to have just the ideas, if we are to remain Jamesian. If we eliminate the ethnography, Jackson says, our ideas become “arcane, abstract, and alienating,” adjectives that might come to mind when reading many studies of James today.⁶⁶

James seems to love the stream of his own consciousness. In part, it’s because concepts can be richer and more effective if there are more connections made, as James says in his discussion of genius and as Seigfried emphasizes, but it’s also because he seems to associate “more” with more life. Look at what he says of the narrow and sympathetic people: “All narrow people *intrench* their Me, they *retract* it—from the region of what they cannot securely possess.”⁶⁷ On the other hand,

Sympathetic people . . . proceed by the entirely different way of expansion and inclusion. The outline of their self often gets uncertain enough, but for this the spread of its content more than atones. *Nil humani a me alienum*.⁶⁸

It’s like James’s praise of his house in Chocorua, New Hampshire in a letter to his sister Alice, “It’s the most delightful house you ever

saw; it has 14 doors, all opening outwards.”⁶⁹ The internal “teeming multiplicity” is valuable for improving ideas but also because it gives us life. James seems nourished by the psychic stream.

This is the second type of Jamesian fieldwork, one we might call auto-ethnography, the personal and particular experiences of the topography of his own thoughts.⁷⁰ James doesn’t need to go to Brazil with Louis Agassiz (or to the Trobriand Islands with Malinowski or to the Ndembu in Zambia with Victor Turner), for he can experience the rich thicket of his own mind anywhere. And yet, the relation to conceptualizing makes this fieldwork and not tourism. It’s not fieldwork for James (or anyone else) to just noodle in his journal or simply enjoy the mental play. It’s not sufficient that it’s “especially deep, extended, and interactive,” in Clifford’s words, but, to complete the passage from Clifford, it also has to be a “research encounter.”⁷¹ There do have to be theories. And yet, as I’ve emphasized throughout this essay, the point isn’t simply to get to the theory or to have a theory that’s improved through reverie (as Seigfried says). Concepts need to be en-livened by remaining in experience (mental life, in this case). James writes in such a way that we *always* see his auto-ethnology, and then we can see our own ideas as *always* in the free water of our own minds. Better concepts isn’t the point; concepts within a rich and inclusive life is.⁷²

I experienced the San Lázaro Festival in a complex and idiosyncratic way—in quite specific culturally patterned ways interrelated with details of my personal history that can often be extremely idiosyncratic. None of that is irrelevant. If we think it is irrelevant, we may feel that an understanding of religion alone is what matters, a knowledge that we can apply at any time or place. But as we’ve learned, understanding is patterned by culture, gender, economics, race, and much else, and thus understanding needs context. But that’s not what James is saying. He’s saying that even the personal and idiosyncratic (my mother’s skepticism about the saints or my own embarrassing bowel movement during the Mass) affect our understandings. We shouldn’t eliminate them so that we can universalize (though that seems noble), or take them into account so that we can have richer theories (though that’s valuable),

but we should strive to see how the whole panoply is at work. All of our theories are steeped in the free water of us, and thus they change as we do, and that's a good thing. Moreover, the independent life of that free water deeply affects our theories, for it is also foreign to our conceptualizing. We need to stay vulnerable to it and intimate with it (that is, vulnerable to and intimate with *ourselves*), and to do so continuously, not as a one and done. We'll never arrive at the end of our theorizing because we're never at an end of our living—until we are, of course.⁷³

I traveled to the Festival of San Lázaro with someone who responded to it quite differently than I did. My childhood parish, St. Boniface, on Long Island, largely consisted of second-generation Irish and Italian Catholics, and though it lacked the public festivals of the saints, they don't feel foreign to me. Seeing the vivid statues of San Lázaro with his crutch and sores and dogs felt familiar enough, as did the crowds lacking decorum, and the multi-sensory engagement. I experienced the saint and his devotion mixed with the dark and incensed interior of old vine-covered St. Boniface, and I felt an uneasy pleasure in that return to a largely unintelligible language, to physical manifestations of sacred power, to anonymous community, to the sense of being watched and judged for proper devotion, and to the curious mix of being both embraced and excluded. The facts of the Festival mixed with the free water of my own psyche.

We would usually consider any fieldwork in Hialeah a “deep, extended, and interactive research encounter” with the *participants* in the devotion to San Lázaro, and not with one's own psyche, but that encounter with the devout is an aspect of the first, third, and fourth kinds of ethnography in James, the participation with the plenum, already discussed, and with the social, interpersonal, and public, which I've yet to address. Less appreciated and more typically Jamesian is the role of auto-ethnography in our study, and it plays a crucial role. I think we can see it by contrasting my engagement with the San Lázaro Festival with that of my companion on the trip. Simply put, he could both participate and observe, and in ways both deep and physically, interpersonally interactive, and I

could not. Those, in spite of very similar demographic backgrounds. We share the same age, race, gender, religious, and, for the most part, ethnic and socio-economic characteristics. And yet, he was able to develop conceptual understandings of great vitality and value, and I was not.

There's an easy explanation: It's his field. He finds the topic of great interest, and has been personally involved in it since graduate school. Demography isn't destiny, as we know. As James would put it, it's also a matter of temperament, or of what becomes a "living option," but that's exactly why auto-ethnography is so important. The cultural patterning caused by gender, race, age, economics, social class, and religion are strong currents in the stream, but they're not all of the water. It's some of the rest of that free water that accounts for the divergence between my companion and myself, and it's auto-ethnography that allows us to understand and affect it.

Participant observation is the dominant method of fieldwork, and the fact that my companion was able to participate and I was not strongly affected our ability to observe. A professor in graduate school introduced my companion to Santeria, and he became deeply involved with a community in the Bronx, going through several stages of initiation into the religion, and a prominent priest, or *Babalawo*, accepted him into his family *en santo* as he wrote a dissertation on the religion, as well as many books and articles since that time. When this scholar of Santeria visits my class and students ask him if he "believes in Santeria," he replies that he doesn't like the word "believes." He prefers to say that he "speaks" Santeria, he says, much as one might speak English or Spanish or Arabic. He can understand and make himself understood. He can live in the language. "Speaking Santeria" shows the involvement of a lot more of his stream of consciousness than does "belief." At the Festival of San Lázaro, I saw him speaking Santeria.

I mentioned at the start of this essay that the devout gave offerings of flowers at the shrine, where they knelt, lit candles, and prayed. When we arrived at Rincón de San Lázaro, my companion bought flowers at a shop that overflowed with yellow and purple bouquets. Then I stood and watched as he approached the front of

the shrine, handed the flowers to an attendant, knelt, lit candles, and remained kneeling with clasped hands for many minutes. An hour or more later, I struggled to convince myself that I could light a candle at the shrine. It was a threshold moment, as I fought to push myself “inside” while I strongly resisted my own efforts. What was the problem? My companion showed no such struggle, and he seemed to worship as he offered the flowers, lit the candle, and knelt. I can’t say my resistance was different than if I’d been in a more conventional Catholic church. It wasn’t *orishas* that was the problem, it was worship. This wasn’t an art exhibit and it wasn’t a display at the Botanical Garden. Kneeling signified something I was unwilling to get too close to. There wasn’t “nothing” there, there was a “something” that I resisted. Eventually I joined the line that led to the altar, received a candle, and then knelt and lit it. At that point, I felt seven years old, and also seventeen, both present like a child and distant like an adolescent. There was power of some sort, and I can only say that it held me “in thrall,” if thrall was something long past but still present. But at the same time, I predominantly noticed how weak the effect was. I told friends later that I felt nothing, except for the heat from the candle’s flame. But it wasn’t nothing. It was nostalgia and also refusal. “Altar,” “worship,” “Catholicism,” “spirit,” even “candle” and “flower,” were nouns related to mental and experiential contexts that were both culturally patterned and idiosyncratic. That “teeming multiplicity” matters a lot, and we can’t ever forget it. Remembering it stops us from essentializing, as Seigfried says, and it also vitalizes with the power and independence of the stream.

James would say there was something in my companion’s temperament or that the worship of *orisha* saints (or more conventional Catholic saints) is a “live option” for him. More fully, as he knelt, his own experience harmonized with the particulars of this experience at the Rincon. Significantly, (and somewhat brilliantly, I think) my companion incorporates them into some of his writings. He includes an emotionally warm relationship with his Santeria godfather, or *padrino*, and with his *madrina*, as well, and a sense of being in a real family. There is a love of ritual with all of

its sensory elements. There is a powerful receptiveness to the drumming of the tradition, to the physicality of the rhythms. We would need to put him on a psychoanalysis couch to reveal all of the elements of his psyche that welcome Santería, and that's the point: Though James is not Freud, and there are significant differences between their views of the mind, the two founding psychologists share views on the "teeming multiplicity" of the mind and its presence in *all* of our living. Mind is not just its matters but all of its flows, and we need to include that context to keep the thoughts alive.

JAMES'S THIRD FIELDWORK

A third kind of fieldwork in James, one more similar to what we're accustomed to, is evident in *The Variety of Religious Experience* where James presents over 300 quotations, usually of religious people speaking in the first person of their own experiences and often at length. The average length of the quoted passages is a striking 240 words, with fifty-two quotes over 390 words, six over 1000 words, and one 1400 words long. An astonishing thirty-six percent of the book is quotation. Seigfried points to a kind of natural history in James, a "gathering together of a wide variety of relevant data" much as happens in the empirical sciences, but with a broader sense of human experience than the sciences usually consider, "including the many realms of reality he discusses in *Principles*, and a whole range of beliefs, intentions, feelings, and needs."⁷⁴ I mentioned earlier that Kuklick traces the origins of anthropological fieldwork to the late nineteenth century, a century when natural history largely characterized the method of many of the sciences, so the link between natural history and ethnography is close.⁷⁵ Crucially, however, James did not collect specimens, and calling what he did natural history is misleading. Yes, it's a broad collection, and reminiscent of the collections of birds by John James Audubon, or the field collections of Alexander von Humboldt or Charles Darwin, because of the sheer number of quotations in James's book and their miscellaneous character. A contrast is often made between natural history and experimental science, the latter of which dominates science today, and to a significant degree, that

difference comes down to control. Experimental science tests a hypothesis as narrowly as possible with strictly limited variables, whereas natural history is inductive and broad: birds of America; underground plants in Freiberg; finches of the Galapagos. James and natural historians have a similar enthusiasm for variety, but James does not treat the varieties of religious experiences as just specimens. Audubon killed enormous numbers of birds so he could paint them. The proverbial butterfly collector pins each to a display. Darwin's servant Syms Covington shot the finches to take them back to England.⁷⁶ James exercises far less control. He allows people into his pages who are very much alive and both powerful and independent. He collects "developed subjective phenomena recorded in literature produced by articulate and fully self-conscious men" and then quotes them at unusual length so that their own words occupy the attention of readers, instead of clipping and managing them, as is the custom today.⁷⁷ It's worth pausing to consider the contrast to current academic writing. I can think of no writings on James (and few, if any, in philosophy or theology) with the number or length of quotations as appear in *The Varieties*. Editors would likely reject such a manuscript, which just emphasizes that studies today might be *on* James, but they are not Jamesian. And, I would claim, that is at a cost.

In addition, he has selected individuals who experience religion as an "acute fever" and with "a discordant inner life" and "exalted emotional sensibility."⁷⁸ In part, he does so because he subscribes to the view that we can see a phenomenon best in its "more fully evolved and perfect forms" but also because encountering such people is, indeed, an *encounter*, and one that is with a person and not with a concept.⁷⁹ What matters to James is not just the nouns used by those he quotes but the writers' relation to those nouns in, for example, the prepositional phrases that denote enthusiasm. James does not seek to simplify or attenuate, editing a quote to reveal the bare concept. It reminds me of his practice of keeping photographs of those writers who interested him.⁸⁰ And it means that the people he quotes had a full personality that we saw in auto-ethnography.

To his vast credit, James does not shy away from those with mental illness but prefers them, no doubt exaggerating their prevalence, but not in order to gain explanatory or moral power over them by pathologizing or pitying, but out of an attraction to the “teeming multiplicity” of humans. James’s presentation of George Fox crying “Woe to the bloody city of Lichfield,” as he walked barefoot through the winter streets of that city, is not, we should remember, James’s story of him but Fox’s own (and over 500 words in length), and James directly repudiates a psychologically reductive explanation of Fox and the others. James’s pragmatic method, which he presents with greater effectiveness in this chapter than in many of his other works, compels us to assess Fox and the others according to a “spiritual” and not an “existential” judgement, that is, according to the significance of the utterances for us as people and not according to their “morbid origin.”⁸¹ That kind of assessment is only possible because James surrenders so much control by presenting such powerful voices at such length, that is, by bringing *people* into his pages and not simply concepts.⁸²

James’s third kind of fieldwork is, again to use Clifford, “an especially deep, extended, and interactive research encounter” that involves a “physical, interpersonal interaction with a distinct, often exotic world” but differently than in the first two types of fieldwork.⁸³ There is a deep, extended, and interactive encounter because the people in his pages have such independence and substance. One just can’t read Tolstoy writing about his depression for over 300 words without being deeply affected, which might be one reason so many readers of *The Varieties* skip the quotations. (Be honest, don’t you, too? I usually do.) The crucial difference from the usual fieldwork is that James doesn’t “go out” except for his excursions into books.⁸⁴ There is no New Caledonia; instead, James’s library includes Tolstoy’s *My Confession* (or Auguste Gratry’s *Souvenirs de ma Jeunesse* or John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* or much, much else). It’s exactly the sort of armchair research that the nineteenth century movement into the field was supposed to replace. And that’s important: James doesn’t go into the field for most of what he writes about in *The*

Varieties. If we're Jamesian in this sense, there is no fieldwork, no ethnology in the proper sense (with an important asterisk, as we'll soon see). There is no need to go to the San Lázaro Festival. For James, we'd read first person accounts of the Festival by its most "fully evolved and perfect forms" as we sat in our libraries.⁸⁵

Yet, as with his other types of fieldwork, it does impact how we study, if we're Jamesian. We study, first, in a library—or, at least, we have literary antecedents in mind as we study. Our "informants" are people who composed their experiences into established forms and revised and polished their manuscripts, and then those compositions went through the entire publishing process of acquisitions and editors and distribution and reviews and sales. The informants have had a cultural impact, as befits "developed subjective phenomena recorded in literature produced by articulate and fully self-conscious men." There's a kind of literary modernism in this third kind of Jamesian fieldwork. Think of the interwoven allusions in Ezra Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley": Homer and the Pre-Raphaelites, Max Beerbohm, Ford Madox Ford, Sappho, Flaubert, Shakespeare, Heraclitus, Wilfred Owen, John Ruskin, Swinburne, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and, of course, so many more. For academics, the modernist model is still common, but the allusions are to James Clifford and Charlene Hunter Seigfried, Michael Jackson, Robert Orsi, Joseph M. Murphy, Jacques Derrida, Ralph Barton Perry, Linda Simon, and, of course, William James, himself. Whatever we study, we do so with our academic antecedents, with our "school" or our sub-discipline, comprised of "developed . . . phenomena . . . produced by articulate and fully self-conscious men." We study from and in libraries. These established and reputable, library-worthy sources limit the degree to which theories are "tested" by the field. To use the expression that James himself proposes in *The Varieties*, theories are more likely to be "philosophically reasonable."⁸⁶

But what makes James different is that while his field might be his academic sources who are the "more fully evolved and perfect forms," they're also literary *people* in this kind of fieldwork, writing in the first person about their religious "fevers," as I've been

emphasizing. James loosely circumscribes the topic, and that topic is religion as it's experienced by individual people. That is, to think about religion is to put oneself in a teeming crowd of those who experience it personally and in a great deal of variety, and not simply to reside within a group of theories that go by the names of people ("Kant says . . ." "Kierkegaard claims . . ." "James argues . . ."). James performs his fieldwork among people, not disembodied and de-personalized concepts grouped metonymically by people's names.

Cornel West and many feminists are right that James excludes many, for race, class, and gender are sieves for full inclusion into his "varieties." Jeremy Carrette, for instance, critiques James for deploring Teresa of Avila's worth as a mystic due to being "overly embodied . . . [and] connected with sexual states and . . . caught in a pathology of pain."⁸⁷ It's one example among many of the "pervasive and explicit sexism in James's philosophy."⁸⁸ West describes James as a "patrician of the street" who is principally interested in "lessening the shock of the new for the educated middle class."⁸⁹ But, as both West and feminist critics point out, there are enormous resources in James.⁹⁰ West puts it well when he says that James, like other pragmatists, is preoccupied "with power, provocation, and personality" and incorporates "contingency and revision into a theory of truth" so that there is a built-in mechanism for his own subversion.⁹¹ The third fieldwork in *The Varieties* exemplifies the role of "power, provocation, and personality" due to the high degree of independence of the words in the book (words so sufficiently personalized that we can call them voices). James models a thinker as one who is surrounded by others' powerful experiences but to a high degree does not subsume them into his own voice. We are Jamesian when we pay attention to the valuable weather of others and remain open to the failure and revision of our theories because of those others.

At the San Lázaro Festival, my first inclination was to use collective nouns to see what was going on—"religion," "Afro-Cuban," "crowd," "festival," "Hialeah," "Miami." If you look back at my opening paragraphs, you'll see the objectifications of narrative

presentation, a scene I depicted from the safety and clarity of the outside, however much that description might value the festival's vivid sensuality and its cultural otherness. But I would cross a power gradient if my description of them, in my own words, became their own words, especially if I were to amass their words in an average of 240 words (or to a maximum of 1400 words), as in James. Yes, those words would be quotations and not spoken words, and I would have curated them, as did James, but they still would have an undeniable power.⁹² After all, thirty-six percent of James's book was not his words. What if thirty-six percent of this essay were the words of Festival participants? The implication is stunning, and we do not understand James and the importance of fieldwork in his writings if we don't recognize that powerful effect.

Jamesian fieldwork in the third sense, then, is encountering people with words, individuals who usually suffer, people who are *not* just members of groups (Santeras, Afro-Cubans, Christians) but individuals we experience as personal and autonomous, speaking of experiences that are to some degree impenetrable yet valuable. As West says, James had a "genuine empathy with those undergoing hardship,"⁹³ and he also saw that "religion . . . generates human heroic energies and facilitates personal struggle in the world."⁹⁴ There are many ways to depict persons. The third Jamesian fieldwork sees persons as solitary individuals struggling and seeking empowerment. That dovetails well with the San Lázaro Festival, for to be Jamesian would mean listening to individuals' own accounts, not the categories of collective nouns, and to hear the hardship and the struggle for a personal access to power. The Festival was one of healing. There were the barefoot, the people in wheelchairs, the man crawling through the street, the many with illnesses and sufferings less visible.

There is the obvious and important problem that James did only library research in this third fieldwork, for he did not, in *The Varieties* go anywhere but to books, a problem I will get to shortly.⁹⁵ But as a model for encountering "concrete experience" and benefitting from it (as we saw in Jackson and Seigfried), by "destabilizing and unsettling" theories as well as vitalizing them,

James still informs our study of the San Lázaro Festival and the nature of study more generally. To study it is not to study the theories of it but the accounts of participants, of the devout. I would need to find and read people writing in the first-person about their diseases, their cancers and heart disease, and that was something I did not do. It's another way in which, for me, to be Jamesian is to fail, for it's to be open to people to a much greater degree than I am. It's also to be more passive than I am, not collecting the writings into patterns ("the barefoot, the people in wheelchairs, the man crawling through the street, the many with illnesses and sufferings less visible"). Notice how loose James's collections are, the "healthy minded" and "sick souls." They are largely useless categories because his impulse simply to collect independent, strong first-person accounts is more powerful in him than the impulse to categorize. I can imagine a Jamesian "fieldtrip" to the San Lázaro Festival simply by reading the many "I went there because" statements. Those would test my theories as Jackson wants. They would "destabilize and unsettle" my own "received ways of seeing the world" through the power of others' words.⁹⁶ I might de-essentialize my own high culture theories, and, more importantly, revitalize my understandings.

JAMES'S FOURTH FIELDWORK

The central question of this paper is whether fieldwork can be Jamesian, and I'm claiming that an intimate and necessary relation exists between James and fieldwork. In fact, I'm claiming that being "Jamesian" is not a philosophical position concerning pragmatism or pluralism or a certain kind of ethics or a view of truth, but a relationship of such ideas to various kinds of non-theoretical experience. Fieldwork or, arguably, ethnography, is integral to James, and not simply because the inclusion of experience is part of James's style, but because of the value of fieldwork to our ideas, of our ideas to our experience. To this point we've seen the importance of the plenum, the teeming variety of the world that date-stamps our ideas of it and provokes conceptions that will work better for us. We've seen James's "auto-ethnography," his stream of

consciousness that always washes through our concepts and influences and challenges them. Both kinds of fieldwork de-stabilize and revitalize the theoretical. Both kinds of experience (and fieldwork) are personal and multisensory, various, and chaotic. His third fieldwork represents much more what we expect when we see that term, an encounter with “others” in their beliefs and practices, and it adds the social to James’s fieldwork, for *The Varieties* is a massive collection of people with remarkable independence from his authorial, conceptualizing voice. The 300 quotations (thirty-six percent of the total text) occupy his writing (rather than being integrated into it), not as an error of editing or vestige of period style, but as an illustration of the combining of theory and fieldwork that comprises the Jamesian method and practice. These three kinds of fieldwork are *within* James’s books and not simply in the background of them. The dependence and the revitalization are visible in James, as it must be if we’re Jamesian.

But there is a fourth kind of fieldwork in James, one more recognizable to us today since, as in Clifford’s definition of ethnology that I’ve used throughout, it physically “goes out.” This fieldwork came into play when James studied psychic phenomena—something, by the way, he did throughout his career, that is, for nearly thirty years. He took seriously the popular interest in psychic phenomena—“mediumship, clairvoyance, mesmerism, automatic writing, and crystal gazing.”⁹⁷ Such phenomena swept parts of the United States and European countries in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, and many serious thinkers and scientists dismissed them, but not James, who was one of the founders of the American Society for Psychical Research and the president of the Society for Psychical Research (headquartered in London).⁹⁸ He emphasized that it was not the “philosophy” (or the belief system) of spiritualism that interested him but its collection of evidence and facts, and in order to investigate them, he went to numerous séances.⁹⁹ His interest, then, was broadly experiential and not just theoretical.

This was most assuredly fieldwork, and one that involved participant observation, primarily at séances conducted by Leonora

Piper, which he attended from 1882 until the year of his death. As Linda Simon notes, James and his wife Alice became interested in the possibility of communication with spirits following the death of the James's infant son, Herman.¹⁰⁰ So James's interest was personal, as we might expect from his second sort of fieldwork, auto-ethnography. Though James's approach was scientific, and he insisted on the most conservative and naturalistic conclusions possible, he was not impersonal. He studied what interested him personally, as in his study of religion, psychology, or the nature of truth.

In addition, as in the "lived experience" we saw in Jackson and the "concrete experience" of Seigfried, James's fieldwork has enormous variety. It's as much a "rich thicket" as psychology was in *The Varieties*, for, as Robert A. McDermott says, James wanted to teach "himself and others to attend to the margins and unusual modes of consciousness."¹⁰¹ Both of those areas of "the world's concrete fullness" provided just the sort of richness that could vivify conceptual understandings and "forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality."¹⁰² This is exactly the value of James we saw Jackson and Seigfried urge. But James's affinity for the "rich thicket of reality" isn't distinct from his personal desire for assurances about Herman, I would think.

James's participation in Leonora Piper's séances was very close to classic ethnographic fieldwork. It was "down-close, empirical, and interactive."¹⁰³ Many commentators mention how tedious James found it, and even the imagining of it prompted McDermott to write, "We can be grateful to James for having spared us the thousands of verbatim stenographic records of the countless sittings that he endured."¹⁰⁴ Jacques Barzun, who presents James the person more effectively than any other, writes that

James did not enjoy this kind of inquiry . . . [The] work itself James found . . . undignified, often disgusting—'a human rathole life.' He reflected that there was no reason why spirit messages—or counterfeits either—should be entertaining or dramatic, any more than ordinary backyard conversation.¹⁰⁵

But tedium seems to be a touchstone of fieldwork. Malinowski's boredom is well known.¹⁰⁶ Inger Sjorslev argues that the "deep hanging out" coined by Clifford Geertz must involve boredom on the part of the fieldworker, for the "lack of opportunities for [mental] action" leaves one open to "the occurrence of the unexpected."¹⁰⁷ While James personally does not praise the "rathole" tedium, all of his types of fieldwork highly value something very similar to it. We have to "leave," by any means possible, and be changed by what we're subjected to in the field. "Close-up" and "extended" involve much of Seigfried's "much-at-once," and it can induce a stupor. But if tedium means losing focus, which is to say, losing the ability to select, in James's sense, its benefit is that it can make us susceptible to what we've excluded or never looked at—the margins McDermott mentioned. It makes Seigfried's reverie possible, but not just because "free association [will] multiply the chances that some fortuitous coupling will arise . . . ," but because we need to lose control and make ourselves vulnerable to the other before any fortuitous couplings might take place.¹⁰⁸

Second, James clearly "[goes] out into a cleared place of work," for he not only leaves his library, but his home, and goes to a place with its own culture, its own set of rules to which he must submit himself. He has an established ritual and set of roles. So Piper is the "medium," and a passive one (not an active medium who levitates or causes spirits to materialize), and a "control" speaks through her to a "sitter," such as James, Alice, or one of James's other investigators (James's preferred term). James doesn't question this arrangement, though he certainly does try to understand it.¹⁰⁹ The authenticity of what he participates in persuades him, for he writes to the American Society for Psychical Research that "I now believe [Piper] to be in possession of a power as yet unexplained," and he attempts numerous theories to understand what he's witnessed.¹¹⁰

Finally, James achieves something he feels is "deep" in this fieldwork. While he isn't persuaded that he's encountered scientific evidence of the persistence of life after death, he has encountered a "More" that deeply affects him and his theories of religion. As McDermott says, James's attention to the subconscious or

subliminal in his study of psychical research “exemplifies the way in which James’s psychical research contributed first to his study of exception mental states, and subsequently to his study of religious experience.”¹¹¹ There is nothing of the tourist in James’s visits to Leonora Piper, and there is nothing of the mere intellectual trying to understand, an equally superficial encounter.

This fourth kind of fieldwork isn’t uniquely Jamesian, and it has more in common with the ethnographic fieldwork we might commonly find. What’s important about it is that James includes it, too. He’s not just the proto-postmodernist we might see in his view of the plenum, the self-reflective psychologist we might suspect on reading *The Principles*, or the armchair natural historian of religion we might see in *Varieties*. Experience for James is personal, multisensory, embodied, social, and public (though not all of those at the same time). We find value in experiences of those types because they destabilize and revitalize our theories. And, finally, experience is ever-present. It’s not something we just theorize about. It’s something that’s always present, even—no, especially—in our writing. That is to say, our theorizing must also include the more familiar ethnographic fieldwork, “physically going out into a cleared place of work for an especially deep, extended, and interactive research encounter.”¹¹² To be Jamesian, we need to get out of our libraries and out of our heads. We need to be with people in practices that prompt “the equally unacceptable extremes of skepticism and uncritical acceptance,” people “both commonplace and bizarre,” as McDermott says.¹¹³

In Hialeah, at the San Lázaro Festival I saw ostensibly very little of James’s fourth kind of fieldwork. I was an observer and not a participant, as I’ve said, and I only talked to the people who we could call practitioners (or the devout) to say “excuse me” if I bumped into someone or “thank you” for a candle. Still, I count the minor key ethnography as extremely valuable for me because it let me know that I study people and not simply myself. And it’s people who are significantly different than I am in the lives they lead and in their religious practices. If I want to claim I have any understanding of what it means to be religious, I need to subject my

ideas to people praying to spirits and not just to people a lot like myself reading Marilynne Robinson or Anne Carson or William James. After all, I felt baffled and quite skeptical when I was told that a candle to San Lázaro could cure my mildly arthritic knee, but I also felt oddly attracted to the suggestion. My view of standard medicine was unsettled in a way Jackson might see as valuable because I didn't take the suggestion as utterly crazy and spent a fair amount of time mentally justifying my commitment to orthopedics.

All four of James's field works have a great deal of independence, as he submits himself and his thought to experience rather than simply to ideas. Experience has to have a weight in order that theory not simply colonize what's other than itself, that is, in order that Jackson's unsettling and Seigfried's de-essentializing can take place. It's the necessary disparity of power between theory and experience that creates the friction I mentioned at the start of this essay. I wrote that "what I know about religion is mixed with the San Lázaro Festival [and] there are useful encounters [and some] useful *change* in all of the elements. And that is, I believe, a good enough metaphor for knowledge, fresh friction of great value." A lack of friction means that what is other than theory has no substance, no heft, no resistance to, and no pressure on our thought.¹¹⁴ Like the quotations in *The Varieties*, we have to be surrounded by others' powerful experiences, which we cannot simply subsume, and that creates the friction that heats and fissures our ideas.

And even though I didn't learn much about the Festival, I did feel surrounded, outnumbered, baffled, estranged, and insufficient. That, I think, is the "power [and] provocation" West says James valued. Not his own power and ability to provoke (that might better describe Nietzsche) but his love of being over-powered and provoked, and certainly not to the point of utter confusion, for James works hard to understand psychic phenomena. But, as McDermott says, he wants to "unlearn orthodox approaches to psychology, religion, and philosophy" by attending "to the margins and unusual modes of consciousness."¹¹⁵ And only margins with the power to provoke can affect that unlearning.

I learned from the San Lázaro Festival that fieldwork is crucial in dealing with James and in dealing with religion in a Jamesian manner. Can we go to the San Lázaro Festival with William James? We *need* to go to events like that festival (and not just to other theories) with William James. When we engage in the fourth kind of Jamesian fieldwork, the other three kinds can emerge, as I've detailed in this essay. In experience, we lose our mastery and submit ourselves and our theories to concrete experience—of the public, social, multi-sensory, and personal kinds. And one sort of experience opens us to another, as the presence of actual worshippers opened me to my personal history and preferences. We experience friction between theory and life, and that friction leads to the kinds of benefits detailed by Jackson and Seigfried: destabilization and revitalization.

CONCLUSION

When I began this essay, I asked about the role of fieldwork in William James, whether one could go to the San Lázaro Festival with William James, and I claimed that a kind of fieldwork—in fact, *four* kinds of fieldwork—exists in James. That fieldwork exists in James insofar as theories must be both tested in and subjected to a broader, non-theoretical experience, whether that experience is of the plenum, the stream of consciousness, the lives of others, or people and practices that might strike us as marginal. Those various experiences have value for revitalizing theories.

But I'd like to conclude with an additional claim, one that I've mentioned throughout this essay. I'd suggest there are real benefits, not only from James's ideas, but from his manner of writing—which is to say, from incorporating fieldwork into writing, as he does. It has become commonplace to write in the first person, abjuring the third person that once dominated all academic writing. No one has yet written a history of the shift away from third person to first in academic writing, to my knowledge, but at some point, maybe around the time of Clifford Geertz, the pronoun, "I" entered academic writing. And yet, the mere letter "I" is not only the skinniest letter but the skinniest presentation of self, and, if we think

we've acknowledged our presence in our writing through that device alone, we've asserted, in fact, a de-personalized, de-contextualized, de-historicized, disembodied, ungendered (and de-much else) self. The crucial exception to the skinny "I" is writing that is assertively situated in gender, race, and sexual orientation.

What we can learn stylistically from James, we can see in virtually any of his writings. *Pragmatism* is a fine example. James uses the pronoun "I" often in his opening pages, but he couples that "I" with emphatic verbs. Yes, there's "I think with Mr. Chesterton," but there's also "I confess to a certain tremor," "I have no right to assume," "I wish to fill you with sympathy," "I profoundly believe," and "I risk it." James is not just the rational "I" but the one with emotions, fears, hopes, beliefs, and desires. His "I" includes much of the stream of his experiencing, as we saw in the second of his fieldworks. I've claimed that the inclusion of such experiences has a value. The value is the admission that we always write as people with the limitations of our own psyches. It's not that we're forever caught in our own minds, but that whatever we theorize takes place within a personal context, and it's best to have that clear. Pretending we have no psychic context doesn't make that context disappear. And in addition, that personal context is of great value (and this is pragmatism, after all), for our ideas must work for us.

Contrast the "I" in some randomly selected articles from *William James Studies*: "I highlight commonalities," "In the end I hope to have demonstrated," "I propose another reading," and "I will not engage in a critical evaluation."¹¹⁶ There is no need to multiply examples, for the statements present the standard "I" of the standard academic essay. Yes, James is, as West says, "the patrician of the streets," but all academic writers have genders, races, ethnic identities, sexual orientations, a particular economic status, personal histories, geographic situations, political commitments, and much else. All of the "concrete experience," the "real life" of the "I" in the above quotes has been eliminated. James's own manner of writing indicates not only that our research takes place in "fields" of various kinds but that it needs to be presented with those fields visible, too. The "I" has to be shown to be vulnerable to context, and the "I" has

to surrender autonomy and control. Yes, sharp-edged and immaculately clean arguments will be lost, but there are also notable benefits of a Jamesian fieldwork: a re-contextualized, re-historicized, re-embodied, re-gendered, re-served self.

Let's go to the San Lázaro Festival with William James.

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NOTES

¹ The scriptural basis for the saint is Luke 16:19-26, not the Lazarus who was raised from the dead in John 11:1-44.

² See Orsi, *The Madonna; Thank You, St. Jude; and Between Heaven and Earth*. It should be said that there is a rich literature of religious practices in the Miami area and those studies are not simply of a European-based Catholicism. See also Tweed, *Our Lady*, and Rey and Stepick, *Crossing the Water*.

³ For the connection between the multi-sensory experience of the Afro-Cuban religion of the *orishas* and the pungency of pre-Vatican Catholic ritual, I owe a debt to Joseph M. Murphy, with whom I have had a great many conversations about Santeria and who visited the San Lázaro Festival with me in 2016.

⁴ Or fieldwork which Clifford uses synonymously with ethnography. Clifford cites Kuklick, "After Ishmael," on nineteenth century ethnography. See also Clifford, *Routes*.

⁵ Clifford, 54.

⁶ Clifford, 53.

⁷ Clifford, 59, 57.

⁸ That exception is James's research into psychic phenomena over the thirty years of his productive life.

⁹ Jackson, *Things as They Are*.

¹⁰ Jackson, 2.

¹¹ Jackson, 4; James, *Pragmatism*.

¹² James, *Pragmatism*, 32.

¹³ Jackson, 4.

¹⁴ James, *Pragmatism*, 33.

¹⁵ It's for this reason that James's books themselves are so experiential, but I'll deal with that later.

¹⁶ I should note that there is also currently the demand that we consider networks of power. Does a theory come from and perpetuate a situation of

privilege? Does it further social justice? The sufficiency of *sola theoria* is challenged by power dynamics, as well as by ethnography, though we might wonder if power can be introduced most effectively if it comes not through yet another theory but via the pressure of ethnography.

¹⁷ Riesman, *Freedom in Fulani*, quoted in Jackson, *Things as They Are*, 7.

¹⁸ Jackson, 7-8. Jackson groups Sartre, Wittgenstein, Bateson, Habermas, Turner, and Kleinman, as well as James's radical empiricism, but I'll deal with just James and with his thought in earlier works than *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, especially *The Principles of Psychology*, *Pragmatism*, and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

¹⁹ Jackson, 7.

²⁰ Jackson, 7.

²¹ Clifford, *Routes*, 53.

²² James, *Pragmatism*, 85.

²³ Jackson, *Things as They Are*, 4.

²⁴ Jackson, 6.

²⁵ It's interesting, too, how many of James's images and expressions for chaotic "lived experience" are outdoors, such as the "stream of consciousness," the "blooming, buzzing confusion," the "rich thicket of reality," and "the everlasting weather of our perceptions." *The Principles*, 233, 462; *Pragmatism*, 39, 85.

²⁶ Seigfried, *Radical Reconstruction*. More specifically, her preferred expression is "concretely derived structures of lived experience" (78). Seigfried rightly wants to maintain what James does not, that "concrete experience" is itself selected, "experience is constituted, not passively received" (76). At the same time, those structures of lived experience are at a more fundamental level than rational systems, which is to say, they are more various and more chaotic. They are the "rich thicket of reality." James, *Pragmatism*, 39.

²⁷ Seigfried, *Radical Reconstruction*, 79.

²⁸ Seigfried, 79; James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 54.

²⁹ James, *Pragmatism*, 39.

³⁰ Seigfried, 78-9.

³¹ James, 17-18, 18.

³² Seigfried, 15-18. Seigfried discusses at length James's struggle with a scientific tendency to simply and passively accept the given nature of

concrete experience and his more characteristic, and to Seigfried, revolutionary, tendency to see selection operating even in the description of the world around us. The key is that James describes his *experience* of the world, and, as he says in *The Principles*, our experience is always interested, thus operates by active selection. Passive description is not possible.

³³ Seigfried, 100.

³⁴ Seigfried, 100; James, *The Principles*, 962.

³⁵ James, *Pragmatism*, 17-18 (my emphasis).

³⁶ Ruf, *Creation of Chaos*, 42.

³⁷ James, *The Principles*, 1231 (his italics).

³⁸ James, 277.

³⁹ James, 1231.

⁴⁰ James, 1232.

⁴¹ James, 1231.

⁴² Jackson, *Things as They Are*, 4.

⁴³ Clifford, *Routes*, 57.

⁴⁴ Clifford, 65.

⁴⁵ Jackson, *Things as They Are*, 4.

⁴⁶ Murphy, *Santeria*, 41.

⁴⁷ Murphy, 41.

⁴⁸ Hart, ““Absolute Knowledge.””

⁴⁹ James, *Some Problems*, 53; quoted in Seigfried, *Radical Reconstruction*, 53 (*inter alia*).

⁵⁰ Seigfried, 115.

⁵¹ James, *The Principles*, 277.

⁵² James, 221.

⁵³ James, 220, 221.

⁵⁴ James, *The Principles*, 219.

⁵⁵ Seigfried, *Radical Reconstruction*, 84.

⁵⁶ James, *The Principles*, 238.

⁵⁷ James, 246.

⁵⁸ James, 227-228.

⁵⁹ James, 226.

⁶⁰ James, 234.

⁶¹ James, 238.

⁶² James, 238.

⁶³ Clifford, *Routes*, 52-54.

⁶⁴ I hope James's example can remind us of why "academic" is not a compliment in literary or artistic circles but a synonym for soulless.

⁶⁵ The account of his "panic fear" in *The Varieties* is the most famous and powerful confessional passage in James, but, of course, it's not identified as his own but as that of a "French correspondent" (134-35).

⁶⁶ Jackson, *Things As They Are*, 2.

⁶⁷ James, *The Principles*, 298.

⁶⁸ James, *The Principles*, 298. Seigfried sometimes compares James to Nietzsche, and James's affinity for "more" is a strong point of similarity.

⁶⁹ James, *Diary of Alice James*, 68.

⁷⁰ I owe the term "auto-ethnography" to Kathryn Wade, who read versions of this essay. We could also call this second kind of fieldwork introspection, but I believe what James does is slightly more passive than we usually consider introspection to be, and I believe that "auto-ethnography" emphasizes the relation to other sorts of fieldwork.

⁷¹ Clifford, *Routes*, 54. (my emphasis).

⁷² We might compare auto-ethnography to psychoanalysis, a similar exploration of the self.

⁷³ James, *Pragmatism*, 11. James's remarks on temperament and on "living options" show the integral role of auto-ethnology in theories and beliefs. A philosopher "trusts his temperament. Wanting a universe that suits it, he believes in any representation of the universe that does suit it." Similarly, an option is living and not dead due to the streaming of our own minds. I cannot be a theosophist because it doesn't fit with what already streams within me. See James, "The Will to Believe," in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*.

⁷⁴ Seigfried, *Radical Reconstruction*, 141-43. Seigfried's central concern is to reconcile two tendencies in James. Sometimes he says that science can simply and passively observe nature, while other times he's aware of the prior shaping such observation has. I am glossing over that complexity and conflict in James. See Seigfried, Chapter 6.

⁷⁵ Perry, in *Thought and Character*, notes, "he had the old-fashioned attitude of the 'naturalist' who collects facts out of doors instead of in a laboratory." (52)

⁷⁶ Steinheimer, "Charles Darwin's bird collection."

⁷⁷ James, *Varieties*, 12.

⁷⁸ James, 15.

⁷⁹ James would seem to define a “person” as one who has the full five characteristics of the mind that he describes in Chapter 9 of *The Principles*.

⁸⁰ Perry, *Thought and Character*, 50-51.

⁸¹ James, *The Varieties*, 26.

⁸² “People,” defined by the full five characteristics of the mind that James describes in Chapter 9 of *The Principles*.

⁸³ Clifford, *Routes*, 54, 57.

⁸⁴ See Ermine L. Algaier’s reconstruction of James’s 1800-volume library in his 2019 *Reconstructing the Personal Library of William James: Markings and Marginalia from the Harvard Library Collection*.

⁸⁵ James, *The Varieties*, 12.

⁸⁶ James, 23.

⁸⁷ Carrette, “Perverse Kind of Pleasure,” 217.

⁸⁸ Tarver and Sullivan, *Feminist Interpretations*, 2.

⁸⁹ West, *American Evasion*, 55.

⁹⁰ Carrette, “Perverse Kind of Pleasure,” 226, points to the fact that for James, “the perceptual world . . . mediates something that escapes patriarchal control, an ‘unseen reality’ emerging at the level of sensation and the body.” What he is referring to is the “too muchness” that Seigfried pointed to.

⁹¹ West, *American Evasion*, 5, 65. Tarver and Sullivan’s entire volume is dedicated to the value of feminism for James and the value of James for feminism.

⁹² And, as it turns out, published accounts of the San Lázaro Festival are extremely difficult to find.

⁹³ West, *American Evasion*, 59.

⁹⁴ West, 66.

⁹⁵ There are a few quoted accounts in *The Varieties* of his final kind of fieldwork, his psychical research, which is much closer to how anthropologists like Clifford understand the practice.

⁹⁶ Jackson, *Things as They Are*, 4.

⁹⁷ Perry, *Thought and Character*, 154. It should be noted that there is evidence of other, somewhat more traditional fieldwork that was out of James’s usual turf. For example, in “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” James wrote of “journeying in the mountains of North Carolina

[and passing] by a large number of coves” (133-34). His psychical research, however, is more intentional and focused fieldwork.

⁹⁸ Perry, Chapter 61. See Sommer, “Psychical research,” and Knapp, *William James: Psychical Research*.

⁹⁹ See Simon, *Genuine Reality*, 190-91, 193, 194, 199-202.

¹⁰⁰ Simon, 198-199.

¹⁰¹ McDermott, *Psychical Research*, xxviii.

¹⁰² James, *The Varieties*, 308.

¹⁰³ Clifford, *Routes*, 52-53.

¹⁰⁴ McDermott, *Psychical Research*, xxi.

¹⁰⁵ Barzun, 240; quoted in McDermott, xxi.

¹⁰⁶ Young, *Malinowski*, xx, 113, 117, 152, 201, (*inter alia*).

¹⁰⁷ Geertz, “Deep Hanging Out,” and Sjorslev, “Boredom, Rhythm,” 100, 107.

¹⁰⁸ Seigfried, *Radical Reconstruction*, 115.

¹⁰⁹ Simon, *Genuine Reality*, 201.

¹¹⁰ McDermott, *Psychical Research*, 82.

¹¹¹ McDermott, xxix.

¹¹² Clifford, *Routes*, 54.

¹¹³ McDermott, *Psychical Research*, xxxix, xxxii.

¹¹⁴ See Winquist’s discussion of “incorrigibility” in *Desiring Theology*, 8-16.

¹¹⁵ McDermott, *Psychical Research*, xxviii.

¹¹⁶ Voparil, “Rorty and James on Irony,” and Zackariasson, “Justification and Critique.”

Review of *Damn Great Empires!: William James and the Politics of Pragmatism*, by Alexander Livingston. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 264 pp. \$30.95.

For those who are more familiar with William James's philosophical writings than the commentary that has grown up around them, it might be surprising to learn that James is seen as having little to offer political theory. The practical orientation of Jamesian pragmatism, along with the references to anarchists (and protofascists), imperialism, real-world suffering that cannot be philosophized away, and working-class life that are peppered throughout James's texts may not add up to a systematic theory of politics, but they certainly point toward intriguing possibilities or, at the very least, interesting connections. However, as Cornel West states in a representative comment, "In regard to politics, James has nothing profound or even provocative to say."¹ In contrast, Alexander Livingston's fascinating reexamination of James's work in *Damn Great Empires!: William James and the Politics of Pragmatism* asserts that "William James was an important and innovative theorist of politics."² Livingston posits that James's anti-imperialist arguments in the letters, editorials, and speeches collected in the *Nachlass* are not only an important part of James's philosophical corpus but also provide a critical lens through which we can fruitfully read the rest of James's work. Though Livingston is not the first to propose a political reexamination of James's thought, his careful and systematic book-length work provides one of the strongest and most sustained arguments for a historical reinterpretation of James as well as the beginnings of a

worked-out political orientation that can usefully diagnose, evaluate, and contribute to solving contemporary political problems.

Livingston's first chapter is an attempt to explain James's exclusion from contemporary political theory. Ralph Barton Perry's influential biography and scholarship on James portrays James's anti-imperialism as "a brief distraction from his more serious philosophical pursuits."³ Livingston argues that one of Perry's chief motivations for portraying James's political pursuits as a temporary dalliance is an attempt to distance James and pragmatism from European fascism.⁴ This worry will likely surprise contemporary readers, but as Livingston details in a brief but fascinating intellectual history, American flirtations with fascism at the beginning of the twentieth century were not uncommon.⁵ James had an intellectual and mutually influential friendship with Giovanni Papini, and fascists, like Mussolini, cited James as an important influence on fascism's anti-intellectualism.⁶ While Perry admits that pragmatism and fascism share a "gospel of action," James "valued energy and militancy . . . only in the service of liberal values."⁷ This allowed Perry to bring James into the canon of Western liberalism, not necessarily as a liberal theorist, but as an "exemplar" of American liberalism.⁸ Livingston sees this reading as not only more reflective of Perry's own political commitments than of James's but also as a pernicious distortion that gave support to political projects and institutions that likely would have horrified James.⁹

In the second chapter, instead of attending to the well-worn details of James's biography or psychology, Livingston proposes to "consider James as *psychologizing* politics itself."¹⁰ Livingston claims that one of the key features of the historical period James lived in was an overwhelming sense of contingency. The feeling that the world lacks a true order, certainty, or foundation leads to "two seemingly contradictory postures of agency": "resignation" or "an inflated sense of sovereignty."¹¹ We can best see resignation in James's discussion of "bigness": the way in which the political, economic, and cultural forces of the gilded age were consolidating into overwhelmingly large institutions and structures.¹² The bigness of the age meant that individuals no longer felt there was a way for

their voices to be heard. In the face of America's growing imperial ambitions, the bigness of political problems could lead to even those with anti-imperialist sentiments acquiescing to the political order.¹³ But a fatalist resignation is part of what feeds the very sense of bigness in the first place, so, as James puts it, "acquiescence becomes active partnership."¹⁴ Alternatively, one can "recover one's individuality through [an] intimate attachment to reality" by finding or aspiring to "success" within that system.¹⁵ In the latter half of the chapter, Livingston reads these ideas from James's letters back into his philosophical works. James, according to Livingston, finds similar cravings for authority in rationalist and monistic accounts of the world.¹⁶ While this turn to James's more systematic work gives Livingston's account more theoretical weight, it is not always clear how these ideas relate back to Livingston's central thesis that James was an important political theorist. Livingston, unfortunately, also does not answer questions like: Is there an advantage to psychologizing politics? Does it lead us to insights that focusing on political and economic structures cannot provide? While a psychological theory of politics is interesting in its own right, James's own anti-imperialist aims and pragmatism's emphasis on the practical make these important questions for such an account.

The third chapter further psychologizes politics through a captivating analysis of "republican melancholia" in the gilded age.¹⁷ Republican melancholia was a further reaction to the "disorienting experience of modern contingency" combined with the closing of the American frontier.¹⁸ Livingston argues that the frontier had played a (morally) cleansing role in the American imagination as a space in which "men" could not only go to make themselves anew, but through which the country itself could continually regenerate its moral identity.¹⁹ Livingston portrays the outward turn of American colonial expansion as a further attempt to master the modern sense of contingency, now that the frontier could no longer play such a role. James's strategy is not to deny this urge towards a "strenuous life" driven by republican melancholia—after all, it was an urge he was all too familiar with himself.²⁰ Instead, he argues for a spiritually strenuous life which is "available to anyone willing to

become strenuous . . . in the service of a moral ideal they wish to make a reality.”²¹ What makes such an ideal worth striving for, for James, cannot be its absolute truth, as such an understanding would undermine his anti-monism and anti-bigness. Instead, it is the novelty of an ideal, within the lived experience of an individual, that makes it worth pursuing. But as Livingston rightly asks, does this give moral principles enough strength that someone could consider one worth dying for?²²

Livingston attempts to answer this question affirmatively in his fourth chapter, mostly by focusing on a speech given by James commemorating a civil war memorial of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts Fifty-Fourth Regiment. James sees a “lonely courage” in Shaw’s decision to lead a regiment made up of African American men.²³ The strenuousness of Shaw’s decisions does not necessarily come from the warfare itself but from Shaw’s willingness to “challenge Americans to trust their own judgement in the face of moral injustice.”²⁴ This spiritually strenuous life is not the result of the infamous “leap of faith” that James describes in “The Will to Believe” but is instead a “stuttering” conviction, one marked more by indecisiveness and doubt than faith and action.²⁵ Livingston argues that James’s stuttering account of Shaw’s life provides a way to see how “agency resides in more subtle and imperceptible connections with others than the language of sovereign decision presumes.”²⁶ While I am somewhat skeptical of the idea that we should see Shaw’s decision-making, as portrayed by Livingston, as the answer to the question at the end of the previous paragraph (after all, according to Livingston, Shaw’s decisions were sometimes a matter of delaying until the circumstances had changed so that a decision was no longer required),²⁷ I think this chapter provides a useful correcting force to those who read James’s work as an attribution of God-like powers to human individuals. Livingston’s reading of “The Will to Believe” here is subtle and sophisticated, and his placement of it in the context of James’s comments on the Civil War could provide lecturers who are teaching it to intro students with some useful tools for framing James’s lecture. While Livingston’s chapter itself is probably too

dense for an audience's first introduction to philosophy, it is not hard to imagine a skilled lecturer using it as background to connect James's work with concrete historical events and decision-making.

Livingston's fifth and final chapter is an overwhelming barrage of Greek mythology, St. Augustine's *Confessions*, a discussion of W.E.B. Du Bois's double consciousness, and an all too brief evaluation of Richard Rorty's patriotic neopragmatism. It is sometimes difficult to grasp the thread holding these ideas together, and even after reading the chapter several times, I continually found myself referring back to the first few pages of the chapter to remind myself of its organizing claims. The heart of the chapter is a reading of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, which Livingston uses to bring issues into James's philosophy that James himself was mostly naive about.²⁸ In other words, unlike many other works comparing James and Du Bois, Livingston's point is not to trace James's influence on Du Bois but instead to view Du Bois's work as a useful corrective to James's blindness on certain issues.²⁹ Despite Livingston's stated intentions, what follows is a mostly straightforward summary of Du Bois's work. Livingston claims that Du Bois provides a "historical and sociological depth missing from discussions of meliorism by both pragmatists and their critics," but it is far from clear whether we should see the resulting depth as a critique of James's political theory, an expansion of it, or both.³⁰ This leads to my main complaint about the final two chapters: While both chapters are full of interesting arguments and historical details, it is not easy to see how they connect to anti-imperialism as an organizing feature of James's political theory. While there certainly are implicit connections between the earlier and later chapters, Livingston leaves most of the work of drawing them out to the reader.

Livingston concludes his book with a brief discussion of the ways in which James's work can connect to contemporary political problems. Mostly focusing on the notion of "empire lite" as argued for by Michael Ignatieff and others, he argues that James provides an alternative version of international relations.³¹ James's anti-imperialist writings help highlight the "injustice and violence of

American power that many are blind to” and imagines a “world of decentered, pluralistic, and autonomous communities of peoples” instead.³² It is perhaps inappropriate to complain about the brevity of these connections in a work on the history of philosophy, but I found myself asking exactly what James’s work is adding to the conversation. After all, the violence and injustice of American imperialism is likely to be recognized in most works of political theory, and so is the imagining of a more just order in its stead. It’s not that Livingston’s James is incapable of answering these concerns, it’s that some discussion of them is required. If we are to take James seriously as a political theorist, some comparison with functioning political theory is necessary. Without this evaluative framework, the identification of injustices and proposal of alternatives risks becoming platitudinous.

While I have a few criticisms of *Damn Great Empires!*, many of my complaints come from a desire for more. Livingston’s analysis of James as a political thinker is both original and compelling in ways that make this reader want further development and expansion. I suspect that readers of James will find much to value in *Damn Great Empires!*, and Livingston’s careful exposition of James’s historical context, and his understanding of it, are a useful corrective to the many overly simplistic understandings of James’s work. The book is a pleasure to read and its writing style is accessible not only to academics, but to upper-level undergraduates and graduate students as well. Livingston’s claims are evocative and convincing enough that one is unlikely to find references to James’s lack of a political theory, like Cornel West’s earlier comment, in the future.

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NOTES

I would like to thank Derek Andrews and Ebony Demers for their useful comments and criticisms on an earlier draft.

¹ West, *American Evasion*, 60.

² Livingston, *Damn Great Empires!*, 4.

³ Livingston, 31.

⁴ Livingston, 33.

⁵ Livingston, 34-5.

⁶ Livingston, 35-40.

⁷ Livingston, 42.

⁸ Livingston, 49.

⁹ Livingston, 51.

¹⁰ Livingston, 54.

¹¹ Livingston, 55.

¹² See James, "To Sarah Wyman Whitman," *Correspondence*, 2: 546.

¹³ Livingston, 57-62.

¹⁴ James, "To Josephine Shaw Lowell," *Correspondence*, 10: 339.

¹⁵ Livingston, 62.

¹⁶ Livingston, 64-75.

¹⁷ Livingston, 79.

¹⁸ Livingston, 80.

¹⁹ Livingston, 80-3.

²⁰ Livingston, 86-7.

²¹ Livingston, 98.

²² Livingston, 98.

²³ Livingston, 104.

²⁴ Livingston, 105.

²⁵ Livingston, 106.

²⁶ Livingston, 125.

- ²⁷ Livingston, 116-7.
- ²⁸ Livingston, 142-50.
- ²⁹ Livingston, 130-1.
- ³⁰ Livingston, 150.
- ³¹ Livingston, 162-3.
- ³² Livingston, 163.

Review of *Pragmatism Applied: William James and the Challenges of Contemporary Life*, by Clifford S. Stagoll and Michael P. Levine (Eds.). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2019. 266 pp. \$90.00.

What if William James was alive today to weigh in on the pressing issues of our time? What would he say regarding the increasing political divide and how it has impacted policies on guns and gun violence? How would we use his philosophy of pragmatism to inform business practices with managers? How might he speak about disability studies taking into account human flourishing and what makes a life significant? In *Pragmatism Applied: William James and the Challenges of Contemporary Life*, editors Clifford S. Stagoll and Michael P. Levine draw together a collection of essays that attempts to consider Jamesian pragmatism applied to some of these contemporary issues.

The editors' aims are two-fold. First, they consider how Jamesian pragmatism can be applied to current issues in America on a range of topics and themes, from practical daily life to political life to personal and professional life. The purpose of this book is, then, to extend James's abstract philosophies into practical engagements. Second, the editors "desire to do justice to James's own emphasis on the action-orientation, consequences, and use-value of philosophy."¹ The editors argue that the purpose is to fill the gap that exists in the "paucity of literature that attempts to apply his philosophy to real-world issues."² Perhaps a reason why there is a

dearth of scholarship pertaining to this issue is that it is a large and challenging task to achieve. Additionally, there are multiple interpretations (and misinterpretations) of Jamesian pragmatism. The result is often conflated “Jamesian/Deweyan” models of pragmatism in action without the discernment of the unique qualities of each.

In attempting to take on this huge task, some authors are successful in presenting the potential *and* realized action-orientation together, while others leave the reader still worried that the hopes are too idealistic (understandably so in such a politically tumultuous time) or that the premise and conclusion remain in the world of ideas instead of allowing for practice and action. As the editors explain, “This volume means to encourage an alternative enterprise, emphasizing various ways in which James’s theories can be used to conceive of and cope with challenges in contemporary life.”³ Continuing, they note that the

point is not just to locate the inherent usefulness of James’s ideas for such matters, but rather, [to draw] out some of the ways in which pragmatism might be made ‘pragmatic’ (in the common sense of that word), to promote James’s own concern with actions and consequences.⁴

For any Jamesian scholar, scholar of pragmatism, or philosopher attempting to find purchase with current events, questions, and issues plaguing (or existing) in our present society, this is a fine book to add to one’s shelf. This text exists as an exercise of public philosophy in action.

James’s pragmatism is “melioristic,” as the editors note, thus lending itself to considering problems and issues in the world today—meaning that pragmatism can be a tool used to consider the good in humankind working towards a better society. The editors explain that James participated in public philosophy, the public sphere, and public affairs through much of his later life, and this book serves to extend this vision of the role of philosophers. James’s

unique pragmatism is personal, experiential, and purposefully open, which lends itself to multiple fields of study.

The uniting factor of this book (and James's thought) is that "the point [of pragmatism and philosophy] is not so much to predefine a problem using philosophical concepts so as to enable a more focused analysis of it, but rather to analyze and propose new ways in which those experiencing the problem might conceive of and respond to it."⁵ The question remains, why James? The editors explain that James's pragmatism is approachable and "encourages bold exploration of ways in which pragmatism might help to realize melioristic intent."⁶ Although a major critique of James is that sometimes his ideas are "inconsistent," his ideas provide an "open-endedness that invites fresh engagements."⁷

The book is organized into three parts, each embodying a different model of applying Jamesian pragmatism to societal problems today. Part 1 is titled "Issues: Putting James to Work." Within these first five chapters, the contributing authors ask questions on topics ranging from gun violence to college breeding to animal ethics to disability studies to race relations. In Part 2, "Theory: Clearing the Way," the editors group authors together for their philosophical interrogation of pragmatism applied to specific philosophical issues, from what it means to live a moral life to understanding experience to understanding self. Each author takes a deep dive into their respective area of philosophy and then includes James as a supplement to their claims. Part 3, "Practice: Living with James," "gets personal," and the aim in this part is to consider how "James's ideas might be adopted to help guide one's own philosophical and professional practice."⁸ Of the three parts, the third is the strongest, taking a direct approach to the book project at hand by addressing Jamesian pragmatism applied to the challenges of contemporary life (that being said, there are highlights throughout the rest of the text.) The topics in Part 3 include nature, business management and ethics, human nature, habit, and war.

We see the highlights of the first part of the book in the specific authors' abilities to first, understand and define Jamesian pragmatism; second, to apply the philosophy to a pressing issue; and

finally, to suggest an action-oriented model or theory that holds weight. Chapter 1: “Listening to the ‘Cries of the Wounded’: Jamesian Reflections on the Impasse over Gun Control,” by James M. Albrecht, defines a key problem in rhetoric surrounding gun control policies and attempts to apply Jamesian pragmatism using an ethical lens to suggest that the ever-growing political divide might find common ground. This chapter is well-argued and clearly laid out. But a lingering question for the author is, can this divide ever truly be closed? And is Jamesian pragmatism still too idealistic to achieve success in finding political common ground? Albrecht admits his idealism but presses forward. He clearly outlines his interpretation of pragmatism and James’s ethics, and while the editors note that some may find the argument “misguided,” the overall impact is that the application of James’s ideas can be provocative and timely.

Additionally, Chapter 4, “Significant Lives and Certain Blindness: William James and the Disability Paradox,” by Nate Jackson, presents a fresh, novel, interesting, and much needed analysis of James within disability studies. Jackson again presents a philosophical issue within disability studies and calls forth Jamesian pragmatism to address the significant lives of those who are differently abled. Jackson considers James’s pragmatism, pluralism, and inclusion by “examining James’s thought as a possible resource for conceiving of disablement in conjunction or as compatible with human flourishing.”⁹ The editors interpret Jackson’s purpose,

James is a source for an ethics of tolerance and for recognition of limitations to judgements of values. He promotes and recommends a type of ‘epistemic humility’ that counters any tendency to dismiss the testimony of others regarding the value, meaning, and quality of their lives.¹⁰

Moving forward, a clearer analysis of Jamesian pragmatism would enhance the argument.

In Part 2, Chapter 6, “Applying Jamesian Pragmatism to Moral Life: Against ‘Applied Ethics,’” Sami Pihlström considers the connection between pragmatism, applied ethics, and moral theory.

One of many clear and thoughtful points Pihlström argues in this essay is that “James’s pragmatic method was, not only a ‘method of making our ideas clear’ as it primarily was for Peirce, but arguably a method of making our ideas ‘ethically clear’—of tracing out the conceivable ethical implications at the core of our concepts and conceptions, even the most abstractly theoretical ones.”¹¹ This chapter takes the purpose of the book to task with fidelity, honesty, effort, and creativity. Part 2 represents a more theoretical and abstract approach to analyzing pragmatism. This process leaves the reader with questions regarding how the author’s considerations of theory connect to practice and represent pragmatism *applied*.

As noted above, Part 3 is the most relevant and engaging part of the book. Each author in this section attempts to consider what pragmatism would look like when applied to the challenges of contemporary life. In Chapter 9, “William James and the Woods,” Douglas R. Anderson considers the significance of James’s time in the country, liberated from “the city and cosmopolitan philosophy,” and finds it to have been integral to human flourishing.¹² Anderson’s chapter is a highlight in this book. He begins with a clear understanding of James—the man (and his history)—before embarking on an analysis of his thought. More philosophers would do well to incorporate historical and personal biographies of James to enhance their philosophical arguments. The author notes “I think . . . James’s philosophical life offers us a significant reminder of the importance of contemplation, meditation, and the practice of ‘musement’ that allow our ideas to work freely.”¹³ Anderson argues that Dewey’s advice to seek experimentalism and community pales in comparison to contemplation and “solitary communion.”¹⁴ However, in the politically tumultuous times we live in, one might ask whether it would be more, or as helpful, to build community in an ever-dividing present. On this note, I wonder what Anderson might have to say to Albrecht’s claims in Chapter 1.

Chapter 10, “Taking James to Work: Pragmatism for Managers,” by Clifford S. Stagoll, may be one of the most successful chapters in the volume, as it conforms to the precise aims of the book. This chapter is also accessible to multiple audiences of

scholars, again providing evidence of the purpose of this action-oriented model of scholarship staying true to James. The purpose of this chapter considers “A Jamesian philosophy of management [that] would emphasize and explain the need for managers to draw information from diverse courses, for instance, to take account of qualitative factors in determining the meaning of quantitative measures, and to develop flexible plans for coping with unexpected events.”¹⁵ Stagoll notes,

The point of a Jamesian approach is not to abandon theory, but to reorient it toward the experience it means to describe and aid. For philosophy of management to be relevant for practitioners, it must recover the concreteness and intricate complexities of management decisions and practices and the circumstances that frame them.¹⁶

The authors highlighted in this review consider Jamesian pragmatism directly and take the book project’s aim to task in their arguments. That being said, each author included in *Pragmatism Applied* provides a meaningful contribution to Jamesian scholarship, yet there is still more to be said in connecting these works to Jamesian pragmatism directly.

Pragmatism as a field of study is complex. Attempting to juxtapose Jamesian pragmatism, which is complex and often misunderstood, with each author’s chosen topic, requires deep knowledge and analysis of the branch of philosophy. Within this collection of works, some authors present a clear understanding of Jamesian pragmatism before connecting it to their chosen topics, while other chapters fall short of demonstrating a connection to Jamesian pragmatism and leave the reader wanting a more in-depth and charitable analysis of William James, his philosophy, and his connection to the world today.¹⁷

The strength of this collection shows in the bringing together of a number of authors from different fields, with different areas of expertise, which provides a diverse group of perspectives. This same strength also demonstrates an area for growth: The authors could

speak to one another. It would be helpful if these authors had the opportunity to revise and edit their chapters, considering the other chapters present in the book to see how they could build connections between their works and make the chapters feel more like an authentic conversation.

As a reader, it would have been helpful to see a more unifying theme executed with fidelity by each author. While some authors provide a clear understanding of Jamesian pragmatism, others continue to conflate Jamesian pragmatism with Deweyan pragmatism and also to potentially misunderstand the life of James and how it applies/connects to his unique philosophy. And while some authors demonstrate an attention to the strengths and weaknesses of James's thought, others do not provide a charitable reading of James and instead use him as a strawman for their argument. Additionally, the editors note James's own pragmatic views of society as seen in *Talks to Teachers*, where he discusses pedagogy and teaching, but if this book is missing anything it is a philosopher of education's perspective on James's pragmatism applied to education.

This ambitious work will hopefully invite other philosophers to the task of making their philosophy public, relevant, and action-oriented. To cite Albrecht's own spin on James, "The philosopher must be conservative" but also must be willing to "break the rules which have grown too narrow."¹⁸ In attempting to find praxis between theory and practice toward an action-oriented public philosophy, the editors have compiled a selection of chapters that attempt to break the mold of philosophy in order to address pressing current issues.

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NOTES

¹ Clifford S. Stagoll and Michael P. Levine, eds., *Pragmatism Applied: William James and the Challenges of Contemporary Life* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2019), xv.

² Clifford and Levine, xv.

³ Clifford and Levine, xv.

⁴ Clifford and Levine, xvi.

⁵ Clifford and Levine, xiv.

⁶ Clifford and Levine, xiv.

⁷ Clifford and Levine, xiv.

⁸ Clifford and Levine, xx.

⁹ Clifford and Levine, 73.

¹⁰ Clifford and Levine, xviii.

¹¹ Clifford and Levine, 134.

¹² Clifford and Levine, xx, 198.

¹³ Clifford and Levine, 200.

¹⁴ Clifford and Levine, 200-1.

¹⁵ Clifford and Levine, xxi.

¹⁶ Clifford and Levine, 221-2.

¹⁷ Clifford and Levine, see Chapters 1, 4, 9, and 10.

¹⁸ Clifford and Levine, 13.

Review of *William James: Psychological Research and the Challenge of Modernity*, by Krister Dylan Knapp. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. 400 pp. \$39.95.

William James said that he was against “bigness” in all of its forms, which would imply being against bigness in corporations and government, for example. It might also imply that he’s against bigness in theories. *Psychical Research and the Challenge of Modernity* seems to present an ambitious interpretation of James’s career. Yet while doing so it presents many smaller but very useful insights about some misunderstood details of James’s life and philosophy. The overall impression is that of a solid work of scholarship that perhaps tries a bit too hard to tidy up the wild strands of James’s life and philosophy into one interpretation, namely that James was always working with a *tertium quid* (“third thing”) method.

Krister Knapp works diligently and admirably to draw out some very useful points for both James scholars and those interested in psychical research more generally. For example, to correct any misunderstandings about the relationship between James and his father in this regard, Knapp argues that the elder Henry James was actually not a fan of spiritualism, at least as it was generally practiced at the time. Knapp shows that Henry James Sr. saw the business as “a too easy path . . . that circumvented revelation with a quick and direct method—the séance—that did not require any effort on the sitter’s part.”¹ Personally, I am not even convinced that

Henry James, in the author's words, "admitted freely that spirits from the other world existed and operated in this one."² Henry James's writings on Swedenborg are philosophical and non-devotional, as if he were merely creating his own naturalistic, socialist philosophy from the texts. Yet Knapp is nonetheless right, and offers that Henry James believed "spiritualism must be useful to be valuable."³

Knapp's work is also useful for understanding the extent to which psychical research was part of James's career. Knapp notes that James's notorious decade-long lag in writing *The Principles of Psychology* was due not to laziness (or better yet, not *just* due to laziness) but rather to a concurrent engagement with the strenuous groundwork of psychical research. Knapp says James wanted to work on *The Principles*, but he "found psychical research much too absorbing, its work much too demanding, and its potential for a major breakthrough in mapping the human psyche much too great to keep that resolution."⁴ This helps us to understand that psychical research was more than just a quirky hobby for James but was integral to his career—for better or worse.

James's psychical research is almost as befuddling to James scholars as the psychical research itself was to him. This is why it is understandable in terms of general scholarship that the author sticks to an overarching *tertium quid* theory when interpreting James for us, but it is not clear that in James's case this is useful. The author concludes many of his topics by reiterating how they fit into the *tertium quid* method, yet it is not always clear to me that the meaning of *tertium quid* is fixed throughout the book. The author rejects the term as referring to an Aristotelian compromise, yet the general sense that comes from reading about James's interactions with scientists and religious people is that this is what he is trying to do.⁵ That might make sense, but it would interest largely only those who focus on academic organizational history and its applications for the current maintenance of academic organizations. When Knapp uses the term to reference more specifically philosophical matters, James starts to seem like a third-way political thinker. And insofar as James

approaches the philosophical equivalent of Tony Blair, he becomes less interesting. As Knapp describes it, the meaning of *tertium quid*

has evolved over time to include both the composite of two other things and some third option distinct from the first two choices. James' *tertium quid* method of inquiry reflected this more modern meaning that combined the positive elements of both extremes while filtering out the negative ones to create a distinct new position . . .⁶

The problem here could be the terms “extremes” and “filtering out.” Extremes, in philosophy and politics, are defined from what is taken to be the center, which is considered moderate and good. But James loved the extremes, and we love him for that. If he was trying to do the *tertium quid* for any other reason than just to help members of the Society for Psychical Research get along, James becomes more understandable, but, again, less interesting.

James loved looking at the big picture as much as any other philosopher, but he loved it only insofar as innumerable little things filled this bigness. As Knapp proceeds through the book, he swaths *tertium quid* over this picture so often that one is mischievously inclined to draw, as did James for his father, a picture of a man beating a dead horse. It is genuinely interesting to read Knapp, noting, for example, the extent to which James felt embarrassed whenever physical medium Eusapia Palladino was caught doing trickery. But then the author does not help James when he tries to explain the problem. In continuing to believe in the eventual verity of the Palladino phenomena, the author says “James’ position was unpragmatic” and “one of the very few times he betrayed his *tertium quid* method of inquiry in favor of a dogmatic one.” And according to Knapp, this represents “how difficult it was for James to defend his *tertium quid* approach over the decades.”⁷ Yet it is Knapp, more than James, who is defending the *tertium quid*.

However, if we step away from the *tertium quid*, we can still see that Knapp’s scholarship is diligent and skillful. *Psychical Research and the Challenge of Modernity* is a well-written work,

full of interesting and useful insights into the borderline madness of James's psychical research. It is important to highlight this appropriately in James studies since, as Knapp argues so well throughout this book, psychical research informs James's philosophy and psychology in ways that we cannot ignore. Knapp's work is useful largely because it does well in bringing out some questions important for the study of James. Was William James a figure for compromise and the preservation of a centrist *status quo*? Or was he searching for some new type of stability? Or was he neither, a perpetual disruptor of stability? I tend to favor James as a perpetual disruptor, a destabilizer of bigness in all of its forms, and, accordingly, I suggest breaking up James and letting him move through the history of philosophy like the sundry wisps of consciousness that he studied.

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¹ Krister Dylan Knapp, *William James: Psychical Research and the Challenge of Modernity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 42.

² Knapp, 38.

³ Knapp, 38.

⁴ Knapp, 125.

⁵ Knapp, 6.

⁶ Knapp, 6.

⁷ Knapp, 289.

Review of *Darwinism and Pragmatism: William James on Evolution and Self-Transformation*, by Lucas McGranahan. New York: Routledge, 2017. 186 pp. \$150.

The history, legacy, and challenge of evolutionary biological theories for philosophy, particularly Darwinism, might yet be something we need to reckon with in a still more serious and explicit manner. An often-overlooked figure of central importance to this debate is William James, but any examination into his import on this topic necessarily leads to the contentious issue of whether or not there is a fundamental coherency to James's thinking. For this reason, Lucas McGranahan's *Darwinism and Pragmatism* is an important contribution to both James scholarship in general as well as to Routledge's series, "History and Philosophy of Biology." While Dewey is most often thought of as "Darwin's philosopher"—and certainly McGranahan makes adequate reference to Dewey's importance—McGranahan's work serves as a reminder that James's philosophy was every bit as much an attempt to wrestle with (as well as a product of) the nineteenth century debates over evolutionary theories of biological origins. McGranahan's work embodies the Jamesian spirit by sitting comfortably in the nexus where philosophy of science enmeshes with the "more" beckoned in several other discourses: social philosophy, psychology, theology, and political theory, among others.

James scholars will undoubtedly find much to consider in this fine work, but McGranahan's purpose is clearly to offer "more" than an intramural discussion of Jamesian interpretation. It is at once a

critique within the philosophy of science about the meaning and application of Darwinism as well as a compelling argument for the continued significance of the pragmatist theory of truth and a radically empiricist attitude towards life.

The subtitle of the book, *William James on Evolution and Self-Transformation*, aptly characterizes the linear nature of the argument. If novelty and self-transformation are truly possible on naturalistic grounds, that must also be demonstrated as such from within the Darwinistic fold. McGranahan's overriding concern is thus two-fold: (1) to argue that a proper (pragmatic) interpretation of Darwinism does not foreclose the possibility of something genuinely new coming forth in human life but indeed helps to make sense of evolutionary theory in general; and (2) to show that James's "double-barreled Darwinian psychology" yields a viable theory of self-transformation that gives both a center *and* structure to James's thought. In drawing attention to both the revolutionary naturalistic grounds of James's thinking and the possibilities of both personal and collective transformation, McGranahan argues that James is "an essentially moral or ethical thinker."¹ That is, James embodies the best of the tender-minded intellect keen on the possibility of an ethical theory, but he does so through a tough-minded examination of the "brute facts" that yield this very possibility instead of assuming it a priori.

In order to give a full-throated defense of this interpretation of Darwinian biology, the whole of James's philosophy has to be considered. McGranahan opens his book with a concise and powerful narrative about the challenge of Darwinism, concluding with what he calls the "Received Image of Darwinism." This, in effect, is a paradoxical situation in which dominant interpretations of Darwinism enshrine, rather than challenge, the ideals of mechanistic, Enlightenment science. McGranahan then notes that "the Received Image of Darwinism assimilates the science of life to an Enlightenment model of physics that is no longer universally accepted even in physics," thus failing to actualize the maturity of its own science by becoming self-aware of its own epistemology.² But, he asks, "What if this occurred in the immediate wake of

Darwin's Origin and we simply ignored it?"³ The purpose, thus, of McGranahan's work is to offer "an alternative to the Received Image of Darwinism through an examination of the writings of seminal American thinker William James."⁴

McGranahan does this in the introduction by articulating James's Pragmatic Image of Darwinism. Although it is a *way* of interpreting Darwinism, those already familiar with James's thought will quickly see how it is characteristic of his whole philosophy—hence the deep impact that evolutionary debates had on James. This pragmatic image of Darwinism is characterized by an emphasis on inherent individuality and the contributions that creatures make to their environment ("Internalism and Constructionism"); a generalization of evolutionary logic, particularly selectionism, to illuminate patterns at various levels of analysis; the fallibility and indeterminacy of truth; and the conviction that reality is dynamic and continuous. He notes, however, that James's Pragmatic Image does not contradict the fundamental philosophical challenges of Darwinism but is rather a particularly "*Darwinian* way of responding to Darwinism, not ostrich-in-the-sand behaviour."⁵ In other words, "A philosophy developed in immediate response to Darwin may yet provide a useful corrective to a calcified neo-Darwinism."⁶

The idea that *there is a center* of James's thinking is of course somewhat contentious. McGranahan is clearly aware of this and self-consciously positions his argument. For McGranahan, self-transformation is the key that unlocks the very possibility of an ethical theory, and he interprets James's philosophy as centered on a generalization of selectionism that opens up this possibility. It is no coincidence, then, that James's major neuroses dealt with the possibility of freedom. While much has been made about James's "Emersonian powers of provocation" (as Cornel West portrays it) and his Promethean emphasis on personal will, there remains the oddly understated fact that, for James, "the possibility of freedom" was always "posited against the background of despair."⁷

Chapter 1, "Individuals in Evolution: James's Darwinian Psychology," will be of particular interest to historians of the

sciences and those interested in James's own intellectual development. McGranahan presents a detailed examination of James's *earliest* writings, both signed and anonymous, that demonstrate not only the deep impact of the debates between evolutionary theories (Lamarckian, Darwinian, Spencerian, among others) but also James's own evolution through them. Perhaps surprising to some, James engaged evolutionary debates in writing throughout the 1860s and 1870s, well before Dewey's career began to take off. What McGranahan solidifies vis-à-vis his argument is the emergence of James's pragmatic image of Darwinism: that "environment" alone cannot fully explain individuals, that they contribute to the construction of their environment, and that an "uncertain science" can be "paradigmatic of all knowledge."⁸

McGranahan then generalizes this argument in Chapter 2, "Individuals in History: Social Evolution without Social Darwinism," beyond the confines of intra-biological debates. Although short, this chapter is necessary in order to show how "James's social evolutionism differs in important ways from social Darwinism, sociobiology and the theory of memes."⁹ The differentiation is not merely to distance James from ethically problematic arguments but also to show how each alternative rests on problematic philosophical bases that don't properly take into account the role of the individual and the philosophical implications of narrow neo-Darwinism. The pragmatic image of Darwinism for which James argues thus offers a much-needed corrective.

McGranahan continues a robust textual defense of his interpretation in Chapter 3, "Self-Transformation: Habit, Will and Selection," by tracing this influence and coalescence of ideas through what we might call James's middle writings:

These writings—especially *The Principles of Psychology*, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*—represent the core of James's thinking. As such, they provide necessary background for interpreting his other writings on such topics as pragmatism, belief and radical empiricism.¹⁰

This is at once on target for his overall argument and also provocative in that it helps to demonstrate how “James the psychologist” and “James the philosopher” are but two sides of the same coin, not two distinct and separable phases of a life. Likewise, this connects also to the existential foundations of James’s thought: “James’s philosophy is rooted deeply in his spiritual crisis of the late 1860s and early 1870s.”¹¹ This lens gives a more holistic understanding to the often-misconstrued (and sometimes lampooned) idea of the Will to Believe while also situating James within the historical context of ideas that impacted him most, namely, selectionism, Renouvier’s understanding of freedom, and Bain and Carpenter’s understanding of self as a plastic bundle of habits. From this emerges a key understanding of James’s mature philosophy of science. In McGranahan’s words:

The willingness to accept the results of empirical inquiry has been a huge advance for society, insofar as this has been achieved. To understand the scientific method in terms of the pragmatic method, however, means contextualizing scientific inquiry within the greater span of human concern.¹²

Chapter 4, “Character Ideals and Evolutionary Logics in James and Nietzsche,” may be the most important contribution this work offers to the history of James scholarship simply for the dearth of detailed comparisons between the two figures. Accordingly, McGranahan aims for this chapter to make up for this historically missed connection. He is quick to note and clear that James did not have a very charitable understanding of Nietzsche, but the two figures nonetheless share an incredible amount in their disposition, concerns, arguments, and historical location. This chapter is no mere comparison, however, but puts forward an important argument about the nature of the self as an evolutionary product that mediates purposively in a dynamic, non-linear engagement with the environment. While both figures were deeply influenced by evolutionary logic, they do indeed split in their interpretation and application of this logic:

Nietzsche therefore does not follow James in using Darwinian non-directed variation as ammunition against externalism. On the contrary, Nietzsche's reason for critiquing Darwinism is the same as James's reason for celebrating it: a belief that agency must be reconstructed, not erased, in the science of life.¹³

This directly impacts their subsequent ethics, which of course differ considerably:

If James embeds self-transformation in a socially shared cooperative project, Nietzsche's ideal is an elite individual that negates humanity's metaphysical needs through ascetic self-overcoming. This reflects James's location of significance in the purposive mediation of ascending levels of individual and social structure for the purpose of creating a maximally inclusive world, as opposed to Nietzsche's prizing of the ennobled supra-historical individual.¹⁴

Once again, this leads directly to a more general level of analysis where, in Chapter 5, "Higher-Order Individuals: Truth and Reality as Organic Systems," McGranahan examines James's philosophical commitments in light of this evolutionary background over against Idealism. This allows for a conception of "the most inclusive realizable whole" that is grounded naturalistically and spawned from idiosyncratic conditions and thus impacts the very meaning of the Good and the content of the world. The real gem of this chapter is that it demonstrates the direct connections between evolutionary logic and the revolutionary nature of James's thinking about the nature of truth (pragmatism, humanism, meaning and function, and objective or absolute truth) and the nature of reality (pluralism, radical empiricism, and panpsychism).

In the final chapter of the book, "Conclusion: Divided Selves and Dialectical Selves," McGranahan explicitly engages the important work of Richard Gale—a move to which he hints at the beginning and here brings his argument full circle. It is also here that McGranahan deals with the specter of James's archenemy: Hegel. The purpose of the book is to reconfigure the meaning of

individuality in a post-Darwinian world, which supports neither myopic economic individualism nor hierarchical social Darwinism.¹⁵ This illuminates the fundamentally ethical character of James's thought:

James built an ethics of self-transformation upon this Darwinian structure. . . . Indeed, the crux of James's ethics and his entire melioristic philosophy is that individuals may in this way spiral their ideals both centripetally into themselves and centrifugally into a broader cooperative social world.¹⁶

This is inherently a dialectical process of dynamic feedback, but it is also re-grounded in naturalistic, radically empiricist-pluralist terms, rather than in a kind of Hegelian monism.

McGranahan also ties these themes to the mystical components of James's thinking. That is, the center and structure of James's thinking is grounded in our inescapable creatureliness, explicated best by a pragmatic philosophical interpretation of Darwinism that simultaneously opens up the possibility of growth and self-transformation that reaches beyond the constraints of the environment (internal and external) in which we find ourselves. The grasping for "more" is a psychological need and also fuels a metaphysical belief about the nature of the universe. Gale concludes that James fails to reconcile the "pragmatic" aspects of a Promethean creatureliness with the mystical dynamism of a universe enfolding itself uniquely and thus ends up with a fundamentally divided and unsystematized philosophy. For McGranahan, however, this is precisely what makes James's philosophy so robust and relevant in the twenty-first century.

Perhaps understandably for any work as strong and well-researched as McGranahan's, its very strength becomes the basis of a weakness as well: It leaves the reader wanting more. This is, of course, a bit of a shabby criticism, since there are always judicious choices that have to be made, but when taking out endnotes and references, the text comes in at less than 150 pages. McGranahan's work is one of possibility: He is arguing from a naturalistic basis for

the *possibility* of transformation, but he only hints at what the purpose or goal of that transformation is. On the most abstract level we may wonder, “For what?” The possibility of becoming “more” unleashes the strenuous mood, but to what end? Admirable as it may be for a purely descriptive account of self-transformation, one wonders also if the processes of growth and transformation can be given a structure or if there is, even when put in melioristic terms, a kind of end goal to it. On this point McGranahan is relatively mute, to which we might reply with a paraphrase of Nietzsche: Humans can endure just about any “what” if they have but the “why.”

On a more practical level of scholarship, another strength-turned-weakness is McGranahan’s engagement with panpsychism and James’s conception of God in Chapter 5. The many lives and legacies of James’s thought rule out any truly systematic engagement with his thought for all but the very few works, so it is always commendable when a work primarily focused on the naturalistic components of James’s thought makes space to consider theological questions. Nevertheless, it remains surprising that neither Whitehead nor the robust tradition of process theology and/or emergentism were addressed at any point, while Karen Barad’s important work on the subject was. Without these interlocutors this section felt arbitrarily truncated (though certainly not *wrong* in any real sense). Likewise, in addressing the importance of James’s legacy in psychology vis-à-vis self-transformation, McGranahan does not give much explanation of why he only engages humanistic and positive psychology. This is especially surprising given his serious engagement with the work of Eugene Taylor, a James *and* Jung scholar whose work did more than any other to show the lines of influence between James and depth psychology in general. Myriad psychologists could easily address the themes that McGranahan touches upon: Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Harry Stack Sullivan, Carl Jung, Ernest Becker, and even Erik Erikson, among others.

McGranahan offers a fine work that is provocative and well-defended. It comes highly recommended, and the criticisms should

be taken as fodder for more robust future engagement of Jamesian thought.

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NOTES

¹ Lucas McGranahan, *Darwinism and Pragmatism: William James on Evolution and Self-Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 11.

² McGranahan, 4.

³ McGranahan, 5.

⁴ McGranahan, 5.

⁵ McGranahan, 5.

⁶ McGranahan, 7.

⁷ McGranahan, 8.

⁸ McGranahan, 49.

⁹ McGranahan, 57.

¹⁰ McGranahan, 72.

¹¹ McGranahan, 72.

¹² McGranahan, 88.

¹³ McGranahan, 109.

¹⁴ McGranahan, 97.

¹⁵ McGranahan, 156.

¹⁶ McGranahan, 157.

RELATED SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS ON JAMES

May 2019–October 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.



Araujo, Arthur. “William James e Whitehead sobre o mito da lacuna explicativa.” [William James and Whitehead on the Myth of the Explanatory Gap]. *Philosophos: Revista de Filosofia* 24, no. 1 (2019): 11-53.

<https://doi.org/10.5216/phi.v24i1.53792>.

The paper presents a re-reading of the explanatory gap problem from the empiricism of William James and Alfred N. Whitehead. Given the respective notions of experience and process of James and Whitehead, the paper seeks to show that the explanatory gap is a philosophical myth in the sense that an ontological continuity is maintained and at the same time combined with an epistemological discontinuity between mind and world or mind and brain—in particular, as illustration of such an incongruity between continuity and discontinuity, the core of the paper is centered around the review of the so-called qualia problem. From the empiricism of James and Whitehead, and in view of the notion of continuity, the paper indicates an alternative to the epistemological deficit of the explanatory gap as well as to the internalist view of mind that it inspires—the idea that the mind is cloistered in the brain. As result, the paper points the timeliness of James and Whitehead’s empiricism in line with the growing non-internalist approaches of mind and cognition in terms of continuity suggested by the respective notions of James and Whitehead’s experience and process.

Boone, Mark J. “William James and Allama Iqbal on Empirical Faith.” *The Heythrop Journal* (July 2019): 1-13.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/hevj.13325>.

American Pragmatist philosopher William James and subcontinent Islamic philosopher Allama Iqbal both believe that religious experiences are an important class of those experiences with which empiricism is concerned. They both explain and defend religious belief on empirical grounds and argue that the ultimate empirical justification of a religious

belief must come by looking at its fruits. This is no accident, for James influenced Iqbal on this very point. However, they diverge in some matters. James defends the right to diverse religious belief and eventually articulates his own account based on religious experience—an account which is intentionally philosophical and not reliant on any religious authority. Iqbal, however, reconsiders and defends Islam understood along largely traditional lines. I compare and contrast James' and Iqbal's religious epistemologies in order to understand both of them better and, hopefully, enrich contemporary reflection on faith and reason through a better awareness of the past dialogue on the subject.

Higgins, Shawn. "A Letter from George D. Ayers to William James." *Theosophical History* 19, no. 4 (October 2018): 132-134.

In a letter dated July 25, 1894, George Ayers recommends to William James a list of books on Theosophy. Ayers was a Boston lawyer and prominent figure in the New England Theosophical community.

Klein, Alexander. "Between Anarchism and Suicide: On William James's Religious Therapy." *Philosophers' Imprint* 19, no. 32 (2019): 1-18.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3521354.0019.032>.

William James's religious writing displays a therapeutic concern for two key social problems: an epidemic of suicide among educated Victorians who worried that a scientific worldview left no room for God; and material poverty and bleak employment prospects for others. James sought a conception of God that would therapeutically comfort his melancholic peers while also girding them to fight for better social conditions—a fight he associated with political anarchism. What is perhaps most unique about James's approach to religion emerges when we consider the

relationship of his therapeutic project to his treatment of religious epistemology. For James took his suicidal peers to need more than tea and sympathy. They needed to be convinced, through rational argument, that religious faith is epistemically permissible in light of their methodological naturalism. That is to say that theoretic success in James's treatment of religion is to be measured by therapeutic success. His argument for epistemic permissibility began by treating religious faith as a "hypothesis." He took naturalism to permit entertaining a hypothesis just in case it is testable, and not contravened by available evidence. So he developed a distinctive conception of God—what he called the "pluralistic hypothesis"—that proposed a plurality of independent entities in the universe, only one of which is God. In contrast to the monistic hypothesis, pluralism is empirically testable in principle. But crucially, the hypothesis is underdetermined by any evidence available now. This purported, in-principle testability would make religious pluralism epistemically permissible to entertain. And since salvation is possible on this view without being guaranteed, the pluralistic hypothesis stands to discourage social and political quietism.

Leary, David E. "William James and British Thought: Then and Now." *BJPsych Bulletin* (September 2019): 1-4.
<https://doi.org/10.1192/bjb.2019.56>.

The American psychologist and philosopher William James drew inspiration from British evolutionary theory, neurology, psychiatry, psychology and philosophy. Trained in anatomy, physiology and medicine, he developed a physiological psychology that offered acute analyses of consciousness and of the relations between mind and brain, habit and thought, cognition and emotion and other aspects of psychology. One of his insights, regarding the relation between attention and will, was based upon his own

experience of panic anxiety, which was resolved through his reading of several British authors. The story of his psychiatric experience, practical response and later theoretical conclusion offers a potential contribution to contemporary therapeutic practice.

Leland, Kurt. "Alarums and Excursions: William James and the Theosophical Society." *Theosophical History* 19, no. 4 (October 2018): 136-157.

This article presents new insights into the status of the psychologist William James's membership in and relationship to the Theosophical Society. It is no surprise that a number of professional and scholarly individuals were attracted to the Society's teachings, so James's involvement should not surprise us. The author presents some notable contributions about James's involvement, not least of which is his discovery of the inclusive years of his membership. His admission date is actually later (1891) than that given in other publications. Although his resignation is not known for certain, the author gives the most likely date to be 1897 because of certain factors explained in the article. James' membership, although brief, is somewhat deceiving since he continued to correspond and associate with prominent Theosophists, including George David Ayers, William Scott-Elliot, and Edward Douglas Fawcett. Membership in any society, however, is not necessarily indicative of a person's degree of commitment to its teaching and principles. From the evidence provided in this article, it would seem that James was not as engaged in the Theosophical teachings principally espoused in Blavatsky's writings or in those that followed. The same could be said about Jack London, James Joyce, and a host of artists such as Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky, who were familiar with Blavatsky's works by Blavatsky or those who followed her. Was their interest predominant or was it only one of

many casual interests introduced through intellectual inquisitiveness? The author raises this question and by doing so reveals a more complex relationship than otherwise suspected.

Livingston, Paisley. “Lange vs James on Emotion, Passion, and the Arts.” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 85 (2019): 39-56.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S135824611800067X>.

According to what is now the standard account in the history of psychology, in the 1880s William James and the Danish physician Carl Georg Lange independently developed a strikingly new theory, commonly referred to as the ‘James-Lange’ theory of emotion. In this paper it is argued that this standard account is highly misleading. Lange’s views on affect in his (1885) *Om Sindsbevægelser* were more cautious than James allowed, and not open to criticisms that have often been levelled against the theory of emotion that James claimed he shared with Lange. In fact, Lange argued for distinctions that James did not mention in his discussion of Lange’s work. Even with regard to the primary emotions, the two thinkers’ explanatory models diverged significantly. The contrast between James and Lange on affect is especially striking in their respective discussions of topics in aesthetics, as is established with reference to Lange’s little-known (1899) *Bidrag til Nydelsernes fysiologi som grundlag for en rationel æstetik*.

Melo, Walter and Pedro Henrique Costa de Resende. “The Impact of James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* on Jung’s Work.” *History of Psychology* (May 2019): 1-15.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/hop0000128>.

William James (1842–1910) is recognized as one of the main proponents of the then-emergent field of scientific

psychology in the 19th century, and Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) is regarded as one of the most prolific authors within the fields of psychiatry and psychology of the 20th century. Previous studies have highlighted the practical and theoretical impact of James on the work of Jung. The present article makes use of detailed research for a deeper look at their theoretical relationship, with a focus on James's (1902/2010) *Varieties of Religious Experience*. This text, written in 1902, was particularly important for Jung's emphasis on fundamental subjective experience, which he evaluated in the book *Psychology and Religion* (Jung, 1938/1973). Moreover, we investigate important aspects of dynamic psychology developed by James, which Jung advanced in some of his works, particularly in "On the Nature of the Psyche" (Jung, 1946/1975a), an essay included in *Structure & Dynamics of the Psyche*. We focus on the idea that Jung's acquaintance with James led him to move away from psychoanalysis. In addition, their meeting shaped Jung's view regarding religious experience and influenced the formulation of his concept of the unconscious.

Menhinick, Keith A. "Confronting Racist Habits: Practical Theological Implications of William James's View of Habit Change." *Pastoral Psychology* (June 2019): 1-14.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-019-00885-2>.

This article conceptualizes racism and privilege as habitual orientations located at the bodily level, not merely at the level of intention and consciousness. Engaging contemporary critical race thinkers, the analysis explores how William James's psychological-pragmatic perspective on habit opens up fresh insight into the nature and function of racist habits. The author looks specifically at the value of James's metaphors of "habits as scars" and "habits as grooved pathways" for conceptualizing racism embedded as bodily habit and habitual orientation. He also applies

Bourdieu's notion of habitus to Christian churches in the United States in order to examine the church as a habituating locus of power and to account for the role of social structures in the formation and reproduction of racist habits. Given the difficulty, even implausibility, of completely erasing racist habits, he considers how James's view of habit change translates into practical theological approaches for confronting Whiteness and developing more racially just pedagogies and practices that gradually orient the body in new habitual ways of being.

Pereira Restrepo, Sebastián. "Emociones, intencionalidad y racionalidad práctica: Un contraste de las teorías de las emociones de William James y Antonio Damasio." [Emotions, Intentionality, and Practical Rationality: The Contrast between the Theories of Emotions of William James and Antonio Damasio]. *Ideas y valores* 68, no. 170 (2019): 13-36. <https://doi.org/10.15446/ideasyvalores.v68n170.77686>.

The article presents and discusses the theories of emotions of W. James and A. Damasio, with emphasis on the intentionality of emotions and their connection with practical rationality. It argues that James' proposal encounters several difficulties in accounting for both aspects of emotions, and shows how Damasio's neo-Jamesian theory partly overcomes some of those difficulties, while giving rise to other objections. Finally, it summarizes Jesse Prinz's proposal regarding emotions as "embodied appraisals," which seeks to combine the cognitive aspect and the corporeal nature of emotions.

Powel, Thomas C. "Can Quantitative Research Solve Social Problems? Pragmatism and the Ethics of Social Research." *Journal of Business Ethics* (June 2019): 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04196-7>.

Journal of Business Ethics recently published a critique of ethical practices in quantitative research by Zyphur and Pierides (J Bus Ethics 143:1-16, 2017). The authors argued that quantitative research prevents researchers from addressing urgent problems facing humanity today, such as poverty, racial inequality, and climate change. I offer comments and observations on the authors' critique. I agree with the authors in many areas of philosophy, ethics, and social research, while making suggestions for clarification and development. Interpreting the paper through the pragmatism of William James, I suggest that the authors' arguments are unlikely to change attitudes in traditional quantitative research, though they may point the way to a new worldview, or Jamesian "sub-world," in social research.

Savransky, Martin. "The Pluralistic Problematic: William James and the Pragmatics of the Pluriverse." *Theory, Culture & Society* (July 2019): 1-19.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276419848030>.

In his lectures on pragmatism, William James famously proposed that the question of 'the one and the many' constitutes the most central of all philosophic problems, and that it is 'central because so pregnant'. Prompted by James' proposition, this article explores the intimately political connection in James' thought between his pluralistic metaphysics and the nature of the problematic as a generative force that impregnates worlds and thoughts with differences: what I here call 'the pluralistic problematic'. Exploring the generative significance of the problematic in James' philosophy, I propose that, where James is concerned, the pluriverse has a thoroughly problematic mode of existence. And pluralism, rather than a celebration of the many, rather than a philosophical exposition on multiple worlds and ontologies, or a theory of the organization of a diverse polis, is first and foremost a

pragmatics of the pluriverse—a political, experimental and pragmatic response to the ongoing insistence of the pluralistic problematic.