WILLIAM JAMES STUDIES

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A Century of Misunderstanding?
William James's Emotion Theory

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Young Scholar Prize Winner

I argue, *contra* traditional interpretations of William James's emotion theory like that of Antonio Damasio and alternate interpretations like those of Phoebe Ellsworth and Lisa Barrett, that James is best classified as a *functionalist* regarding emotion. In arguing for this point, I will make four textual claims: (1) James was an important precursor to Basic Emotion Theory (BET) and his theory is best identified as a flavor of BET; (2) James's theory individuates emotion categories by their *evolutionary, functional roles*; (3) The only necessary condition on something being an emotion is that it is a bodily feeling; and, (4) Contrary to Barrett and Ellsworth, James was loath to offer a definitive list of basic emotions not because he loathed taxonomy but rather because he thought psychology was not yet a natural science with well-defined theoretical categories. I will then argue that a proper understanding of James's emotion theory defangs some critiques of BET and of Neo-Jamesian theory.

Phoebe Ellsworth, in her 1994 article "William James and Emotion: Is a Century of Fame Worth a Century of Misunderstanding?" wryly observed: "Ask anyone about William James's theory of emotion and you will almost certainly hear about the bear."[1] This opening sentence sets the stage for Ellsworth's critique of the standard interpretation of James's theory of emotion. The standard interpretation of that theory sees James claiming that emotions like anger, disgust, fear, etc., are discrete categories constituted exclusively by the perception of internal bodily feelings. This article, coupled with the 1994 release of Antonio Damasio's explicitly "Neo-Jamesian" *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, led to a significant resurgence of scholarly and scientific interest in James's emotion theory that persists to this day. Ellsworth's article has spawned a large secondary literature regarding the proper historical interpretation of James's emotion theory, with numerous emotion theorists claiming that their theories are the true inheritors of James's legacy.[2] I will begin this paper by outlining the traditional interpretation of James as a proponent of Basic Emotion Theory ("BET") and then profile Ellsworth's alternate interpretation as a counterpoint. I argue that James's emotion theory has been largely misunderstood, not just by the aforementioned representative examples but also by Ellsworth herself. In arguing for this historical point, I will forward four claims: (1) James was an important precursor to BET and his theory is most comfortably identified as a flavor of BET or proto-BET; (2) James's proto-BET individuates individual emotion categories by the *evolutionary, functional roles* of emotions rather than by later BET's focus on *emotion signatures* in facial expressions, the autonomic nervous system, etc.; (3) The only necessary condition on something being an emotion in James's theory is that it is a bodily feeling, though appraisals often in fact play important roles in emotion generation; and finally, (4) contrary to both Barrett and Ellsworth, James was loath to offer a definitive list of basic emotions not because he loathed taxonomy but rather because he thought psychology was not yet a natural science with well-defined theoretical categories. After marshalling evidence for

these four claims, I will canvass how many of the most popular and recent readings of James (both friendly and critical) get him wrong, and I will subsequently extract some lessons for the contemporary emotions debate whose argumentative dialectic is (to this author, at least) largely the same as it was when James was writing. In particular, I will argue that a proper understanding of James's emotion theory defangs some traditional critiques of BET and of Neo-Jamesian theory, forcing critics to reformulate their critiques.[3]

I. THE TRADITIONAL ACCOUNT OF JAMES'S EMOTION THEORY
Perhaps the most famous passage in the last two centuries of emotion theory comes from James's 1884 article in *Mind* entitled "What is an Emotion?". Pre-Jamesian accounts of emotions saw emotions as intrinsically motivating mental events that induced us to action. James, in "What is an Emotion?", sought to turn this common wisdom on its head:

> Our natural way of thinking about these standard emotions is that the mental perception of some fact excites the mental affection called the emotion, and that this latter state of mind gives rise to the bodily expression. My thesis on the contrary is that *the bodily changes follow directly the perceptions of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur is the emotion.* Common sense says, we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep; we meet a bear, are frightened and run; we are insulted by a rival, are angry and strike. The hypothesis here to be defended says that this order of sequence is incorrect, that the one mental state is not immediately induced by the other, that the bodily manifestations must first be interposed between, and that the more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be. Without the bodily states following on the perception, the latter would be purely cognitive in form, pale, colorless, destitute of emotional warmth. We might then see the bear, and judge it best to run, receive the insult and deem it right to strike, but we could not actually *feel* afraid or angry.[4]

Emotions, *per* James, are not mental events that induce action but perceptions of internal bodily feelings that arise when we engage in action. In this regard, emotions are caused by "exciting perceptions" and by actions rather than actions being caused by emotions. This account of emotions as bodily feelings is coupled with a Darwinian story about how this special subset[5] of bodily feelings came to be:

> . . . the nervous system of every living thing is but a bundle of predispositions to react in particular ways upon the contact of particular features of the environment. As surely as the hermit crab's abdomen presupposes the existence of empty whelk-shells somewhere to be found, so surely do the hound's olfactories imply the existence, on the one hand, of deer's or foxes' feet, and on the other, the tendency to follow up their tracks . . . The labors of Darwin and his successors are only just beginning to reveal the universal parasitism of each special creature upon other special things, and the way in which each creature brings the signature of its special relations stamped on its nervous system with it upon the scene.
>
> Every living creature is in fact a sort of lock, whose wards and springs presuppose special forms of key—which keys however are not born attached to the locks, but are sure to be found in the world near by as life goes on. And the locks are indifferent to any but their own keys.[6]

Emotions, for the James of "What is an Emotion?" are bodily feelings that prepare us to act in certain ways in order to solve certain problems due to both adaptive pressures by natural selection and our individual faculties for associative learning and habit formation:

> To discuss thoroughly this objection [that the objects of our emotions are conventional] would carry us deep into the study of purely intellectual Æsthetics. A few words must here suffice. We will say nothing of the argument's failure to distinguish between the idea of an emotion and the emotion itself. We will only recall the well-known evolutionary principle that when a certain power has once been fixed in an animal by virtue of its utility in presence of certain features of the environment, it may turn out to be useful in presence of other features of the environment that had originally

nothing to do with either producing or preserving it. A nervous tendency to discharge being once there, all sorts of unforeseen things may pull the trigger and let loose the effects. That among these things should be conventionalities of man's contriving is a matter of no psychological consequence whatever . . .[7]

This reading of James's emotion theory, though from before the time when BET was known as such, shares numerous commonalities with the later theory forwarded in different guises by Silvan Tomkins,[8] Paul Ekman,[9] Carroll Izard,[10] Damasio,[11] and others. Canonical BET proposes that emotions are evolutionarily selected-for "modules" or "affect programs" with a distinct neural or behavioral signature for each basic emotion such as anger, fear, sadness, etc.[12] Basic emotions are evolutionarily selected-for, found universally in human culture, and constitute more complicated emotions via their combination.[13] Given the high degree of similarity between James's theory in "What is an Emotion?" and later examples of self-consciously adopted BET, many BET proponents have retroactively dubbed James a basic emotions theorist. Later on, I will argue, *contra* Ellsworth and Barrett, that this decision to call James a proponent of BET is a legitimate historical move, but not in the way that he has been commonly understood as such. I will now profile Ellsworth's alternate interpretation.

II. ELLSWORTH'S COGNITIVE-APPRAISAL INTERPRETATION OF JAMES

Ellsworth's main textual source for her reinterpretation of James's theory of emotion is his 1894 *Psychological Review* article "The Physical Basis of Emotion." In this article, James responds to various criticisms of his theory that had been developed since the publication of "What is an Emotion?". Ellsworth's main contention is that James is best characterized as a progenitor of the later cognitive-appraisal theory of emotions rather than as a proponent of BET. The cognitive-appraisal theory of emotions, first forwarded by Stanley Schacter and Jerome Singer, claims that emotions are

combinations of undifferentiated states of physical arousal (i.e. emotions do not have distinct neural or behavioral signatures) coupled with a *cognitive appraisal* of a situation.[14] On this account, fear is, roughly, a physiological state of high arousal and negative affect coupled with an appraisal of the eliciting situation, say, encountering a bear, as dangerous. Another way of putting this is that both bodily feelings and cognitive appraisals are necessary conditions for an emotion to occur. Ellsworth argues that the textual basis for this interpretation lies in James's clarifications in "The Physical Basis of Emotion" coupled with a careful analysis of the phrase "perceptions of the exciting fact" found in the canonical quote in "What is an Emotion?".[15] Ellsworth takes "perceptions of the exciting fact" to obviously mean cognitive appraisal—we judge the bear as frightening, and, coupled with our bodily disturbances, are put into an emotion state of fear. Furthermore, Ellsworth argues that the common reading of James, where the temporal sequencing of emotion events is such that behaviors determine emotion rather than *vice versa,* is incorrect. Rather, the proper interpretation of James problematizes the idea of a privileged temporal ordering, because he sees these processes as simultaneous:

> Debates about the primacy of cognition, bodily responses, or feeling make little sense when emotions are considered as a stream. The question of the role of peripheral feedback only makes sense when phrased as the question James' hypothesis originally posed: Are bodily sensations necessary for the subjective feeling of emotion? The question of whether what is occurring is an emotion at all becomes a matter of semantics, of different theorists' preferences for different moments in the flow of events when, according to their different definitions, "cognition," or "affect," or "bodily feedback," or "emotion" has been achieved. Over the past century, James' stunning paragraph, describing the sequence of events in large units of perception (see a bear), behavior (tremble, run), and feeling (feel afraid) has drawn our attention away from the recognition that none of these units is elemental, none is stable. They are all in motion, all the time, and there is no reason to believe that one must end before another begins.[16]

While this description of the process of emotion generation sounds Jamesian in temperament with its focus on process, flux, and boundary-mixing, it does not cohere well with James's established writing on the temporal sequencing of physiological processes found in his other work. The reason James has the temporal ordering of emotion events that he does is because of his interpretation of contemporary physiological knowledge found in his 1880 article "The Feeling of Effort." In that article, James makes the claim, *contra* Wilhelm Wundt and others, that bodily sensation is an *afferent feeling*. This is to say that the cognitive intention to move does not the create the feeling of effort beforehand by "innervating the nerve currents" of the muscles, skeleton, and viscera of the relevant motor region, rather the nervous of activity of the muscles, skeleton, and viscera generate the feeling of effort, which we then take notice of:

> In opposition to this popular view, I maintain that the feeling of *muscular* energy put forth is a complex *afferent* sensation coming from the tense muscles, the strained ligaments, squeezed joints, fixed chest, closed glottis, contracted brow, clenched jaws, etc., etc. That there is over and above this another feeling of effort involved, I do not deny; but this latter is purely moral and has nothing to do with the motor discharge. We shall study it at the end of this essay, and shall find it to be essentially identical with the effort to remember, with the effort to make a decision, or to attend to a disagreeable task.[17]

Bodily feelings, for James, strictly precede cognitive interpretations, and he thought this because of the contemporary physiological understanding of how afferent nerve currents in the motor system worked. Since James launched an extended defense of the idea of a privileged temporal sequencing of physiological processes in "The Feeling of Effort," we can reasonably assume that James cared about establishing a temporal and explanatory ordering of events involving bodily sensations (including emotions), contrary to Ellsworth. Ellsworth also gets the reconstruction of James's

temporal ordering wrong, even as she decries attempts to identify a privileged temporal ordering of emotion generation. She characterizes James's main innovation as changing the common sense understanding of emotion processing of Stimulus → Interpretation → Affect → Bodily Response by switching bodily response and affect. But really, James's view at the time of "What is an Emotion?" seems to be Stimulus → Bodily Response → Interpretation → Affect rather than Stimulus → Interpretation → Bodily Response → Affect.

Note that this textual claim can coexist with the further claim that there is no privileged temporal ordering *tout court*. James may well have been searching for a privileged temporal ordering that is appropriate for the purposes of scientific psychology. This gloss can render much of James's work on the psychology of his day consistent with the self-professed perspectivalism found in the rest of his corpus. Later, I will elaborate on this point in further detail.

Ellsworth's alternative reading of James is called into further question by James's belief that "exciting perceptions" can bypass interpretation, as when "we abruptly see a dark moving form in the woods our heart stops beating, and we catch our breath instantly and before any articulate idea of danger can arise," or when we have a strong association between stimulus and response through classical conditioning.[18] Furthermore, her account of James as a cognitive-appraisal theorist faces significant difficulty in reconciling the idea that emotions are epiphenomenal with appraisal theory generally, since cognitive appraisals are usually taken as action-motivating. While Ellsworth is correct in her main contention that James has been misread in the century since his death, her alternative reading does not pass muster as an exegesis of James's theory of emotions. I will now offer my own interpretation of James's theory of emotions in the following sections.

III. JAMES'S FUNCTIONALIST THEORY OF EMOTIONS

Contrary to both the mainstream interpretation of James as a traditional proponent of BET and Ellsworth's alternate account of James as a proto-appraisal theorist, I will argue that James is best

characterized as a *functionalist* about emotion categories. A functionalist with regard to emotion categories is different from a traditional Basic Emotion theorist, who usually defines emotions as evolutionarily task-specific but whose conditions of membership are predicated on *interindividual similarity* rather than *functional role*. This is another way of saying that traditional BET posits certain 'signatures,' whether facial, autonomic, or cognitive, that are the essence of what it is to be in a certain emotion state. In contrast, James's emphasis is squarely on the role played by each of our emotion categories rather than by any specific similarity in every instance of, say, anger:

> Both Dr. Worcester and Mr. Irons are struck by this variability in the symptoms of any given emotion; and holding the emotion itself to be constant, they consider that such inconstant symptoms cannot be its cause . . . People weep from excess of joy; pallor and trembling accompany extremes of hope as well as of fear, etc.
>   . . . How can any definite emotion, he [Dr. Lehmann] asks, exist under such circumstances, and what is there then left to give unity to such concepts as anger or fear at all? The natural reply is that the bodily variations are within limits, and that the symptoms of the angers and of the fears of different men still preserve enough *functional* resemblance, to say the very least, in the midst of their diversity to lead us to call them by identical names. Surely there *is* no definite affection of 'anger' in an 'entitative' sense.[19]

James explicitly rejects the idea that there are any facial expressions, autonomic signatures, or cognitive appraisals that are fixed and invariant in an emotion category, though he also affirms the reality of certain congenital dispositions that arise because of our physiological and evolutionary organization:

> That one set of ideas should compel the vascular, respiratory, and gesticulatory symptoms of shame, another those of anger, a third those of grief, a fourth those of laughter, and a fifth those of sexual excitement, is a most singular fact of our organization, which the labors of a Darwin have hardly even begun to throw light upon. Where such a prearrangement of the nerve centres exists, the way to

> awaken the motor symptoms is to awaken first the idea and then to dwell upon it. The thought of our enemy soon brings with it the bodily ebullition, of our loss the tears, of our blunder the blush. We even read of persons who can contract their pupils voluntarily by steadily imagining a brilliant light—that being the sensation to which the pupils normally respond.[20]

On this reading, fear is united when one predisposes oneself to neutralizing a threat, in extreme cases through fight or flight, but also in more mundane cases like avoiding rain through the purchase of an umbrella. Anger predisposes one to respond aggressively to correctly perceived injustices and inequities committed by others, etc.[21] The next question this account needs to answer is: what fixes the function of a certain emotion category? The answer is two-fold: the first, and most general, answer is the Darwinian one. We have the predisposition to act in certain ways because of the process of natural selection. A human whose fear response included walking towards a bear with open arms would not survive very long in our ancestral epoch, and so natural selection favored certain kinds of responses to certain kinds of problems. Much of this line of thinking can be found in the previously quoted material from "What is an Emotion?" on page four of this paper. The second way our emotions can be functionally defined is by way of associative learning: we fear getting wet and so avoid it by buying an umbrella. We do this through force of habit rather than evolutionary selection insofar as we had to go through multiple individual experiences of getting wet before we established the association between rain and feelings of unpleasantness from wet clothes, hair, etc.

One tension in this reading of James that must be addressed, however, is the relationship between emotions and motivations for action. Recall James's assertion in "What is an Emotion?" that emotions do not motivate action but rather arise as a result of action. If emotions are defined by their functional role, they are implicitly defined in terms of predispositions to act in certain ways, given certain apprehensions of bodily feeling, to accomplish certain evolutionarily-prescribed goals. If this is in fact the case, then there is an inconsistency in James claiming that emotions are both

functional predispositions and that they do not motivate action. I think this tension dissolves if the following passage is carefully read, however:

> I think that all the force of such objections lies in the slapdash brevity of the language used, of which I admit that my own text set a bad example when it said 'we are frightened because we run.' Yet let the word 'run' but stand for what it was meant to stand for, namely, for many other movements in us, of which invisible visceral ones seem by far the most essential; discriminate also between the various grades of emotion which we designate by one name, and our theory holds up its head again. 'Fear' of getting wet is not the same fear as fear of a bear. It may limit itself to a prevision of the unpleasantness of a wet skin or of spoiled clothes, and this may prompt either to deliberate running or to buying an umbrella with a very minimum of properly emotional excitement being aroused. Whatever the fear may be in such a case it is not constituted by the voluntary act.[22]

When attended to, this passage indicates that James eventually abandoned the position he was most famous for: that emotions are not themselves motivating. This commitment falls out of the theory when suitably clarified in "The Physical Basis of Emotion" because internal visceral changes, rather than behaviors, are what cause emotions. This leaves space for emotions to motivate action—perceptions of internal bodily change give rise to emotional mechanisms that *then* predispose one to act in a variety of ways—and it seems as if James has acknowledged this point by calling "we are frightened because we run" a "bad example."[23] A coherent functionalist account of James's emotion theory is committed to the claim that James ultimately rejected the epiphenomenality of emotions. Indeed, it seems as if James was committed to the motivating nature of emotions in other writings, and he seems to have not made a similar point regarding epiphenomenality at any point past 1884's "What is an Emotion?", which lends plausibility to the interpretive claim that he ultimately revised his idea regarding the motivational status of emotions. So much the better for his theory.

The next aspect of James's theory to be addressed is what constitutes the *process* of emotions in the body and brain. My functionalist reading of James agrees with the traditional interpretation in claiming that emotions are perceptions of bodily feelings and not perceptions of bodily feelings *and* a cognitive appraisal like that of Ellsworth and later, Lisa Barrett.[24] James repeatedly stresses the physiological nature of emotions in all his written works on emotions, even going so far as to claim that if we:

> try to abstract from our consciousness of [the emotion] all the feelings of its characteristic bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no "mind-stuff" out of which the emotion can be constituted, and that a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains.[25]

The cognitive-appraisal interpretation can only be saved on this point if, as Ellsworth argues, "exciting perceptual facts" are all and only appraisals.[26] But along with the passage from the *Principles* quoted in section II regarding how certain emotions can be elicited without the mediation of an appraisal mechanism, James is also committed to the idea of *objectless emotions*. Objectless emotions do not obviously involve appraisals,[27] and there are passages where the existence of such objectless emotions leads James to *explicitly reject* appraisals as being necessary conditions for emotion generation:

> Both Dr. Worcester and Mr. Irons insist on the fact that consciousness of bodily disturbance, taken by itself, and apart from its combination with the consciousness of an exciting object, is not emotional at all . . . The facts must be admitted; but in none of these cases where an organic change gives rise to a mere local bodily perception is the reproduction of an emotional diffusive wave complete. Visceral factors, hard to localize, are left out; and these seem to be the most essential ones of all. I have said that where they also from any inward cause are added, we *have* the emotion; and that then the subject is seized with objectless or pathological dread, grief, or rage, as the case may be.[28]

The balance of textual evidence indicates, contrary to alternative readings of James, that emotions are fundamentally perceptions of the feeling of internal bodily change in the viscera. Visceral factors are, for James, those parts of the inner body that are the sources of *involuntary feedback*, such as glands, reflexes, etc., as opposed to the largely (though not entirely) voluntary internal feedback of the muscles.[29] This is not to say that visceral factors are the *only* internal bodily feelings relevant to emotions—it is just the case that they are the most important, given the voluntary nature of the muscular system in James's account. To the extent that there are involuntary musculoskeletal sensations that prime us for action, those play a role in emotion generation as well.[30] On this reading, then, the presence of evolutionarily and individually selected-for internal visceral feedback that predisposes the user to action is what differentiates emotions from other affect-states—visceral feedback is a necessary condition on emotion generation.

While James denies that appraisals are a necessary condition for emotion generation, he does not deny the importance of appraisals in most cases of emotions—of course, cases of shame, anger, and fear routinely involve the assessment of something as meriting shame, anger, or fear—but James wants to make the claim that despite appraisal's importance in paradigm cases, the only thing present in *all* cases of emotions is the perception of felt bodily (especially visceral) change.

My final interpretive claim is that, contrary to Ellsworth and Barrett, James was in fact searching for a privileged set of emotion categories but that he thought there was a privileged schema only *relative to the purposes of scientific psychology*. Ellsworth makes the claim that James was not a Basic Emotion theorist because he would be loath to privilege a certain set of emotional categories as the "right" or "real" one:

> James probably would not have condemned the study of the processes by which people or cultures select meaningful events from the infinity of possibilities or the comparison of different emotional

representations across individuals or cultures. What he did condemn was the assumption that some particular selection was the right one or the real one, that by studying and documenting one particular arbitrary set of distinctions in detail we might discover truths about emotion that would hold for all people and all times. He would have rejected the idea that there are 6 or 7 or 10 or 20 basic emotions, and the effort to prove that a particular affective experience should or should not be considered an emotion. Likewise he would have been contemptuous of efforts to establish definitive distinctions among related emotions such as guilt, shame, embarrassment, and humiliation or empathy, sympathy, compassion, and pity unless the effort was designed to apply only to a particular culture at a particular moment.[31]

While it is true that James never explicitly offered a definitive list of basic emotions, he did come very close:

> Rapture, love, ambition, indignation, and pride, considered as feelings, are fruits of the same soil with the grossest bodily sensations of pleasure and of pain. But it was said at the outset that this would be affirmed only of what we then agreed to call the "standard" emotions; and that those inward sensibilities that appeared devoid at first sight of bodily results should be left out of our account.[32]

Rapture (read as happiness), love, indignation (read as anger), and pride are canonical examples of basic emotions in later BET. Throughout his writing on emotion, James routinely refers to these paradigm cases of emotion as paradigm cases, even going as far as calling them "standard emotions."[33] While he did not explicitly say that these are privileged emotion categories, it at the very least reduces the evidentiary plausibility of Ellsworth's claim that James would have rejected a list of basic emotions outright. Ellsworth cites the following passage to further support her claim that James would be loath to privilege a particular categorization as *the* correct categorization:

> This is all I have to say about the emotions. If one should seek to name each particular one of them of which the human heart is the seat, it is plain that the limit to their number would lie in the introspective vocabulary of the seeker, each race of men having found names for some shade of feeling which other races have left undiscriminated. If then we should seek to break the emotions, thus enumerated, into groups, according to their affinities, it is again plain that all sorts of groupings would be possible, according as we chose this character or that as a basis, and that all groupings would be equally real and true. The only question would be, does this grouping or that suit our purpose best?[34]

Ellsworth, strictly speaking, is correct in saying that James would never claim there is *one* privileged emotion category *irrespective of one's purposes*, but he is very clear that there can be privileged emotion categories given the necessities and demands of the inquiry in question. And, in fact, James advocated for a shift to a more naturalist methodology in scientific psychology that would see rationalist introspective psychology replaced by the psychology of "the biologists, nerve-doctors, and psychical researchers."[35] In doing so, James explicitly advocates for a set of privileged categories with respect to psychological science, namely the ongoing identification of mental states with brain states and peripheral nerve currents:

> One great reason why Professor Ladd cares so little about setting up psychology as a natural science of the correlations of mental with cerebral events, is that brain states are such desperately inaccessible things. I fully admit that any *exact* account of brain states is at present far beyond our reach; and I am surprised that Professor Ladd should have read into my pages the opinion that psychology as a natural science must aim at an account of brain states exclusively, as the correlates of states of mind. Our mental states are correlated *immediately* with brain states, it is true; but, more remotely, they are correlated with many other physical events, peripheral nerve currents for example, and the physical stimuli which occasion these. Of these latter correlations we have an extensive body of rather orderly knowledge. And, after all, may we not exaggerate the degree

of our ignorance of brain states themselves? We do not know exactly what a nerve current is, it is true; but we know a good deal *about* it . . . Now the provisional value of such knowledge as this, however inexact it be, is still immense. It sketches an entire program of investigation, and defines already one great *kind* of law which will be ascertained. The *order in time* of the nerve currents, namely, is what determines the *order in time,* the coexistences and successions of the states of mind to which they are related. Professor Ladd probably does not doubt the nerve-current theory of motor habits; he probably does not doubt that our ability to learn things 'by heart' is due to a capacity in the cerebral cortex for organizing definitely successive systems of paths of discharge. Does he then see any radical reason why the *special time-order* of the 'ideas' in any case whatever of 'association' may not be analogously explained? And if not, may he not go on to admit that the most characteristic features of our faculty of memory, of our perception of outer things, of our liability to illusion, *etc.,* are most plausibly and naturally explained by acquired organic habitudes, stamped by the order of impressions on the plastic matter of the brain? But if he will admit all this, then the diagrams of association-paths of which he preserves so low an opinion are not absolutely contemptible. They do represent the *sort* of thing which determines the order of our thoughts quite as well as those diagrams which chemists make of organic molecules represent the sort of thing which determines the order of substitution when new compounds are made.[36]

James brought this naturalistic attitude to the study of emotion as well, and his loathing of contemporary emotion taxonomies is best explained not by Ellsworth's invocation of his relativism but rather by their unsuitability *for the purposes of scientific psychology*:

Were we to go through the whole list of emotions which have been named by men, and study their organic manifestations, we should but ring the changes on the elements which these three typical cases involve. Rigidity of this muscle, relaxation of that, constriction of arteries here, dilatation there, breathing of this sort or that, pulse slowing or quickening, this gland secreting and that one dry, etc., etc. . . . We should find a like variation in the objects

which excite emotion in different persons . . . The internal shadings of emotional feeling, moreover, merge endlessly into each other . . . The result of all this flux is that the merely descriptive literature of the emotions is one of the most tedious parts of psychology. And not only is it tedious, but you feel that its subdivisions are to a great extent either fictitious or unimportant, and that its pretences to accuracy are a sham. But unfortunately there is little psychological writing about the emotions which is not merely descriptive. . . . But as far as "scientific psychology" of the emotions goes, I may have been surfeited by too much reading of classic works on the subject, but I should as lief read verbal descriptions of the shapes of the rocks on a New Hampshire farm as toil through them again. *They give one nowhere a central point of view, or a deductive or generative principle* . . . Is there no way out from this level of individual description in the case of the emotions? I believe there is a way out, but I fear that few will take it. The trouble with the emotions in psychology is that they are regarded too much as absolutely individual things . . . But if we regard them as products of more general causes (as 'species' are now regarded as products of heredity and variation), the mere distinguishing and cataloguing becomes of subsidiary importance. Having the goose which lays the golden eggs, the description of each egg already laid is a minor matter. Now the general causes of the emotions are indubitably physiological.[37]

What James is advocating here is an explicitly *revisionary* program for emotion theory in scientific psychology. The revision consists in rehabilitating our scientific-psychological emotion categories into a more naturalistically respectable idiom by focusing on "a deductive or generative principle." This generative principle, for James, is the Darwinian functionalist view: emotions are perceptions of bodily change that are evolutionarily derived and predispose us to act in certain ways, and this principle encourages a reorientation away from the highly abstracted and metaphysical categories of introspective psychology and toward a focus on the physical, neural basis of the emotions. So, while James may have never offered a list of basic emotions, it may very well be that if we rehabilitated our psychological categories to his preferred functionalist and

physiological specifications, he would be more than happy to privilege these emotional categories *for the purposes of affective science*. And, crucially, all BET requires (when plausibly characterized) is that there be a privileged set of discrete emotion categories for the purposes of affective science.[38] Since James *wants* a privileged set of discrete emotion categories for the purposes of affective science, he is most plausibly described as a Basic Emotions theorist, though very different from classical BET. Now that I have offered a compelling third interpretation of James's emotion theory, I will close by suggesting how this interpretation of James's emotion theory can help inform contemporary debates surrounding BET.

IV. WHAT BASIC EMOTION THEORY IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

BET has recently come under serious attack from various flavors of constructionism with regard to emotion. The central claim of those critical of BET is that, much like James's critics before them, BET cannot account for the radical heterogeneity of our emotion categories. Recent empirical evidence, they contend, suggests that the only thing that fear, anger, happiness, love, etc. have in common is the fact that we label them as such.[39] BET, in its positing of neural or behavioral signatures for each emotion category renders itself empirically inadequate because none of these signatures have been forthcoming in practice. What this interpretation offers the contemporary emotion debate is a way for Basic Emotion theorists to respond to this critique of the research program. Since James explicitly disavowed interindividual neural/behavioral signatures of the kind that later theorists claimed as constitutive of emotion, it allowed him to account for the variability of emotion categories by uniting them under their common function. In fact, many recent proponents of BET have made this move, classifying basic emotions in terms of "action readiness,"[40] which is a broad enough category, by virtue of its functional nature, to account for much of the variability constructionists see as problematizing BET.

Another advantage of this interpretation of Jamesian theory is that it allows for both the classical Jamesian and Neo-Jamesian accounts to adequately explain how perceptions of bodily feeling are

action-motivating. A traditional critique of Jamesian and Neo-Jamesian theory is that it dispenses with or severely reduces the action-guiding role of emotions. This is a legitimate critique on both the standard reading and Ellsworth's reading of James's emotion theory insofar as it seems glaringly obvious that emotions do motivate action, and yet James strenuously denied their action-motivating character.[41] But once it is made clear (and it hasn't been sufficiently made clear in previous James scholarship) that James eventually discarded this portion of his theory in exchange for emotions acting as *functional predispositions to act*, a major critique of Jamesian and Neo-Jamesian theories must be reformulated (by showing how predispositions to act still aren't motivating *enough* for a plausible theory of emotion) or thrown away entirely. Finally, an understanding of James's aspirations for turning psychology into a properly natural science might motivate us to keep BET, given its fecundity as a psychological research program over the past century, even in the face of difficult critique. We might take the lack of unification in our emotion categories not as evidence of absence of unity but rather as a plea for better research methods, more fine-grained terminology, and more clever experiments.[42] These observations resonate nicely with some of James's opening and closing words in "A Plea for Psychology as a 'Natural Science'":

> Psychology, indeed, is to-day hardly more than what physics was before Galileo, what chemistry was before Lavoisier. It is a mass of phenomenal description, gossip, and myth, including, however, real material enough to justify one in the hope that with judgment and good-will on the part of those interested, its study may be so organized even now as to become worthy of the name of natural science at no very distant day. I hoped that my book would leave on my readers an impression somewhat like this of my own state of mind. I wished, by treating Psychology *like* a natural science, to help her to become one . . .
>
> It seems to me, finally, that a critic of cerebralism in psychology ought to do one of two things. He ought either to reject it in principle and entirely, but then be willing to throw over, for example, such results as the entire modern doctrine of aphasia—a very hard thing

to do; or else he ought to accept it in principle, but then cordially admit that, in spite of present shortcomings, we have here an immense opening upon which a stable phenomenal science must some day appear. We need not pretend that we have the science already; but we can cheer those on who are working for its future, and clear metaphysical entanglements from their path. In short, we can aspire.[43]

CONCLUSION

I began this paper with a profile of the traditional view of William James as a traditional Basic Emotions theorist, and then I contrasted it with an alternate reading found in a series of papers by Phoebe Ellsworth that characterized James's emotion theory as a precursor to cognitive-appraisal theories of emotion. I argued that both accounts misread James and offered a third account of James as a proponent of a *functionalist, evolutionary* version of BET. In forwarding this third reading, I made four textual claims: (1) That James is best characterized as a proponent of BET; (2) That James thought the only necessary condition for emotion generation was the perception of internal bodily feelings; (3) That James's BET individuates emotion categories by their evolutionary and functional roles; and, (4) that Ellsworth and others are wrong in asserting that James was loath to offer a privileged taxonomy of emotion categories for the purposes of scientific psychology. After discussing each of these claims in detail, I subsequently suggested ways in which this interpretation could be profitably applied to contemporary debates concerning BET and Jamesian theories of emotion by problematizing constructionist critiques of both. I closed with the observation that, whatever its ultimate status, BET has proven to be a useful theoretical program, and that this reading of James might encourage us to treat its deficiencies not as reasons to discard it but, more aspirationally, as reasons to improve it. Here is to hoping.

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NOTES

[1] Ellsworth, "William James and Emotion," 222.

[2] For some representative examples, see Barrett, *How Emotions Are Made*; Damasio, *Descartes' Error*; Prinz, *Gut Reactions*; and, Ekman, "Expression and the Nature of Emotion."

[3] There is some tension between James's views about interpretation, argument, and predication and the historical-exegetical enterprise of reconstructing his view in a rigorous way. James was always skeptical of definite pronouncements on what *x* phenomenon *really* is or is not. That said, his enormous influence in emotion theory and the number of different theorists who jockey both critiquing and lauding his influence invites a

careful analysis regarding what he said, to the best of our ability. While a rigorous reconstruction may leave something out, I think James himself would understand the usefulness of this particular endeavor for the ultimate purpose of clarifying his historical influence on emotion theory.

[4] James, "What Is an Emotion?", 170.

[5] It is important to note that James's theory never states that *all* bodily feelings are emotions; rather, it is the case that emotions form a special subset of bodily feelings that are defined by their functional, adaptive value.

[6] James, 170–1.

[7] James, 175.

[8] See Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*.

[9] See Ekman, "Expression and the Nature of Emotion."

[10] See Izard, "Facial Expressions and the Regulation of Emotions."

[11] See Damasio, *Descartes' Error*.

[12] Modules are a term in cognitive science and evolutionary psychology for domain-specific, task-specific, independently organized processing architectures instantiated in the brain. See Fodor, *The Modularity of Mind*, for the canonical expression of the modularity hypothesis, though most discussion of modularity in evolutionary theory since Fodor's publishing of *The Modularity of Mind* have significantly weaker conditions for modularity than Fodor demands.

[13] Ekman, perhaps the most prominent contemporary Basic Emotion theorist, posits six universal emotion expressions and therefore six basic emotions: anger, happiness, surprise, sadness, disgust, and fear. Any and all other emotion states are constituted by combinations of these six basic emotions. Others identify more or less, depending on their commitments, usually ranging from between six (Ekman) and twelve (Izard).

[14] See Schachter and Singer, "Cognitive, Social, and Physiological Determinants of Emotional State."

[15] See pages 2-3, above.

[16] Ellsworth, "William James and Emotion," 228.

[17] James, "The Feeling of Effort," 85.

[18] James, *The Principles*, 1072.

[19] James, "The Physical Basis of Emotion," 303–4.

[20] James, "The Feeling of Effort," 105–6.

[21] See again James, "What is an Emotion?", 170–71.

[22] James, "The Physical Basis of Emotion," 302.

[23] James, 302.

[24] And the more recent interpretation of Reisenzein and Stephan, "Emotional Action Generation," who I take to be the most sensitive interpreters of James's emotion theory currently working.

[25] James, "What is an Emotion?", 173.

[26] Ellsworth, "William James and Emotion," 225.

[27] Perhaps objectless emotions involve a general appraisal of the state of the world at large. But the function of appraisals as motivators to action in appraisal theories seems to lose its force when applied to objectless emotions, which generally are not nearly as motivationally strong as intentional emotions. The claim that objectless emotions do involve appraisals seems, at least to this reader, ill-motivated and ad hoc.

[28] James, "The Physical Basis of Emotion," 305–6.

[29] Ellsworth, "William James and Emotion," 223.

[30] This point is not well appreciated, and Damasio, in *Descartes' Error* and *The Feeling of What Happens,* cites it as one of his main points of departure from traditional Jamesian emotion theory. But, in fact, they are not disagreeing at all, except perhaps on the relative importance of musculoskeletal feedback.

[31] Ellsworth, "Basic Emotions," 24-25.

[32] James, "What is an Emotion?", 170.

[33] James, "What is an Emotion?", 170.

[34] James, *The Principles*, 1097.

[35] James, "A Plea for Psychology," 277.

[36] James, 275–77.

[37] James, *The Principles*, 1063-65. Emphasis mine.

[38] Proponents of BET have not emphasized this point enough, in my opinion.

[39] See Barrett, "Are Emotions Natural Kinds?" and *How Emotions Are Made*, and Russell, "Core Affect," for some now very influential critiques.

[40] See Frijda, *The Laws of Emotion*; Teroni and Deonna, "Getting Bodily Feelings"; and Adolphs, "How Should Neuroscience Study Emotions?" for representative examples of functionalist takes on BET.

[41] Most recent empirical evidence for the proposition also seems to corroborate our strong intuition. See Baumeister, et. al, "How Emotion

Shapes Behavior"; Reisenzein, "Emotional Action Generation"; and Weiner, *Judgments of Responsibility*, for the relevant data.

[42] Indeed, recently utilized statistical analysis techniques, like Multivariate Pattern Analysis, have found relatively robust statistical correlations to the level of significance, though the use of these methods in emotion theory remains controversial.

[43] James, "A Plea for Psychology," 270, 276–77.

BELIEF: A PRAGMATIC PICTURE
A PRÉCIS

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I n *Belief: A Pragmatic Picture,* I defend a "pragmatic" analysis of belief. My aim in this essay is to summarize the conception of belief I advance in this work. I articulate a definition of belief; I explicate the intended concept by applying the definition to a range of cases; show how the concept can be integrated with a number of the cognitive sciences, including cognitive neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, social psychology, and the diagnosis of several psychopathologies; and describe the role played by the resulting "picture of belief" in the development of pragmatism by James, Peirce, Dewey, and the heirs to their school of thought.

I.   THE PRAGMATIC DIMENSION OF "BELIEF"

The pragmatic conception of belief revolves around a definition of "belief" as the state of mind a human or other animal occupies when information is poised to guide her self-controlled, attentive actions. To believe something is to have information so poised. Since attention and control admit of degree and are heterogeneous in extension, and since information can guide some but not all of the attentive, self-controlled actions available to an agent at a given time, this definition picks out a paradigm or set of paradigms we can compare against actions for the purposes of determining whether or not their agent believes whatever information those actions manifest. I advance the definition for this purpose.

Since pragmatists do not privilege speech—or communicative action more generally—over other kinds of action in their analyses of belief, we fully acknowledge the difficulty of inferring belief from behavior. We privilege spontaneous assertion and self-report in practice if only to keep our discussions focused on our common problems rather than the degree to which people believe what they've said about these problems. Of course, people often believe what they spontaneously assert. But according to our definition, people do not believe what they've said when the information in question fails to guide most (if not all) of the extra-communicative actions to which that information is relevant.

As a further consequence of deemphasizing assertion in our analyses of belief, pragmatists posit unresolvable vagueness in the informational content of our minds or nervous systems. Consider a standard example in this literature: the dog who perks up when she hears her owner's approach and trots to the door for a greeting. We can't know whether the dog is guided by the fact that her *friend* is home or the recognizably distinct proposition that her *owner* is home, because the distinct concepts we frame with these expressions have no direct corollary within the mind of the dog. But that doesn't mark a distinction in kind between "us" and "them" because human belief is also indeterminate. To cite an important (if loaded) example: there is no fact of the matter as to which population Thomas Jefferson had in mind when he concluded, "All men are created equal." At most, we can say that human thought is more determinate than the thought of other animals. We achieved this greater determinacy together, by establishing "natural" languages. As members of a linguistic community, we each seek to explain and clarify our more automatic communicative acts and non-communicative deeds to one another. These interpretive processes fix the contents of our beliefs in the pragmatic sense at issue when (but only when) a person's self-interpretations guide her actions and she therein comes to believe (in the sense defined) what she has interpreted herself as believing all along.

But there are cases in which there is no real dispute over the information guiding an action, but there is some question as to whether the agent under review *believes* that information. Immoral and socially unacceptable forms of discrimination supply theorists with an extremely important set of examples of this phenomenon. For instance, it may be clear that a person fears black men more than white, holding all else fixed. We can imagine that the subject betrays differential aversive responses to the two parties (or pictures of the two parties), that we detect the neural correlates of greater fear toward one group in comparison to the other, that an introspectively accessible feeling of fear is more pronounced in the presence of members of one group in comparison to the other, and so on. For the purposes at hand, the parties evaluating the agent might agree that

they can adequately describe the information guiding her reactions as "a representation of black men as more dangerous than white." But despite this agreement, we may still wonder whether the content of this representation is something the agent *believes*. Mightn't she remain afraid of someone or something she knows is *not* dangerous? According to its advocates, the pragmatic definition has real utility in these cases. The question is whether the agent under review is so disposed, at the time in question, that she would have brought this representation (of black men as more dangerous than white) to bear on those tasks to which it was then relevant, were she focused on these tasks and executing them as intended. In *Belief,* I propose that "explicit racism" be identified with racist belief (so defined) and "implicit racism" be identified with racist representations that are not beliefs.[1] I leave open the question whether the kinds of representation that together constitute wholly implicit racism are sufficiently unified to warrant coining a term for them, e.g. Gendler's "a-lief."[2]

Though the pragmatic definition was not crafted with racial discrimination in mind, I have argued that pragmatism provides an attractive way of conceptualizing these cases for those of us dedicated to living in racially diverse communities in which each member regards herself as a potential friend of each other member and is therefore dedicated to doing his or her best to regard every other member with a certain basic level of respect. Explicit racism is not compatible with this attitude and consists of racist beliefs (among other things). But as I'd like to use the term, purely "implicit" racism, if there is such a thing, does not involve racist belief at all, and it *is* compatible with a commitment to mutual respect between diverse peoples. We should expect that someone who has made this commitment but has not yet achieved the outcome to which she is committed will have egalitarian beliefs alongside non-egalitarian reactions. But this does not mean that belief in the value of friendship between racially different people is easy. It requires those of us who are implicitly racist to do what we can to quash, subvert, or rid ourselves of attitudes that belie our beliefs. To satisfy the pragmatic definition of "belief," this state of

mind must guide the agent's actions when she is in full possession of herself.

The pragmatic account I defend in *Belief* includes both the first-order definition of belief described above and this avowedly pragmatic (contingent) rationale for adopting the first-order definition; and it advances a consilient scheme of psychological classification. This last bit is necessary, as the kind of conceptual holism embraced by the standard lineup of pragmatist philosophers entails that defining "belief" has ramifications for the reader's conception of perception, memory, self, and the rest. In this respect, the pragmatic account of belief generates a meta-level pragmatism. As a matter of intellectual history, pragmatism began with a "first-order" analysis of belief in "object language" terms, an account that can be easily integrated with cognitive neuroscience because it was introduced by thinkers who had that end in mind. (More on this below.) But pragmatists have come to accept, too, the conceptually distinct "second-order" claim that the pragmatic analysis is one of several "workable" definitions of "belief," each of which is "empirically adequate" in the sense at issue. And pragmatism, as I advance it in *Belief,* includes, too, a frankly normative appeal to the reader to adopt this first-order definition for the way of life it affords. Admittedly, this discursive act presupposes that adopting the pragmatic definition of "belief," and so coming to have certain beliefs about the nature of belief, is itself properly analyzed by the first-order definition in question. In other words, the reader coming to believe the pragmatic theory of belief is itself a matter of her becoming poised to use the definition of "belief" (or the conception of belief that definition affords) to guide her actions when she sufficiently attends to its relevance and exercises control over herself. Because of this consistency between the various components of the pragmatic theory, we can describe accepting the pragmatic definition of belief as adopting a "philosophy" or way of life. Thankfully, we don't have to coin a term here, as the philosophy in question already has a name: "pragmatism."

II. THE HISTORY OF THE DEFINITION

As a matter of intellectual history, the pragmatic approach to analyzing belief came into its own in the nineteenth century, when Alexander Bain, the founder of *Mind*, and one of the leading British psychologists and philosophers of his time, argued, in *Mental and Moral Science*, that "what we believe, we act upon."[3] It is fair to say that Bain's work on the topic of belief sparked a pragmatic revolution in psychology and the philosophy of mind that somehow lost its momentum when Bertrand Russell[4] proposed that beliefs are essentially "propositional" attitudes and Frank Ramsey[5] analyzed the attitude in question as the willingness to bet on the truth of a proposition.

To be fair, in their written work, Russell and Ramsey explicitly noted that they did not mean their analyses to apply to beliefs as a whole. For one thing, Russell allowed that some human beliefs lack propositional objects. He even countenanced detached feelings of conviction that lack content of any kind (propositional or otherwise), echoing James on this subject. For his part, Ramsey acknowledged that the other animals have beliefs in a perfectly legitimate sense of the term, and he allowed that these animal beliefs are not fruitfully described as bets on the truth of anything. But many analytic philosophers have now come to assume some form of Jerry Fodor's language of thought hypothesis, which Fodor designed to wed Carnap's equation of beliefs with sentences, with an acknowledgement of animal belief.[6] Can't we reconcile the propositional attitude analysis of belief with evolutionary psychology by allowing that the other animals "grasp" or somehow represent propositions? The main problem with the Fodorian approach is that the language of thought hypothesis is not well confirmed; it is not, as Fodor claimed, "the only game in town."[7] Many researchers have explored the idea that animals think with maps or images or schema of other kinds, and have contrasted these forms of representation with sentences. Of course, one might say that when a rat's neurology contains a map-like representation of its environment, it therein represents those propositions we would articulate to describe what that map represents. The pragmatist

simply insists that the rat doesn't "grasp" or "represent" or "believe" these propositions in any further sense than this. It is appropriate for us to use propositions to depict the rat's mind when that serves our communicative purposes, but it would be more accurate to use a map to explain how the rat in fact represents its environment. Speaking of the rat's representation as itself a propositional attitude, when it is in fact more map-like in structure, courts confusion.

Famously, Fodor did not limit his endorsement of the language of thought to the thin thesis described above. Though his arguments for the thesis were fairly *a priori* (the "only game in town"), he regarded the hypothesis as itself *a posteriori*: he posited an amodal structure, downstream from sensory perception and upstream from motor control, where tokens in the language of thought interact when we think, reason, and infer.[8] In contrast, the pragmatist does not rest the case for animal belief on the discovery of an amodal, extrasensory, pre-motor language of thought. Even if my dog thinks in images rather than words, and his thoughts are only "propositional" in the sense that we (humans) can use propositions to describe what he is thinking, still, he will regularly come to believe that I'm home and that I'm about to serve dinner.

It is well known that Descartes argued that from their communicative limitations that animals don't think at all, and equally well known that Hume belittled this position as ignorant beyond measure. It is perhaps less commonly reported that a century later, Charles Darwin leaned on a philosopher of mind—Bain—to confirm Hume's observations on animal belief. The origins of American Pragmatism in Bain's work are also less well known. But according to C.S. Peirce, it was Bain's work on belief that drew Peirce and James into agreement with the other members of Harvard's "Metaphysical Club" and thereby occasioned pragmatism as a philosophical movement. This pedigree justifies my use of "pragmatic" to describe the definition of "belief" I defend in *Belief,* and it supplies the first mark in favor of the conception on offer. Bain designed his analysis to provide a bridge between evolutionary biology, neuroscience, experimental psychology, and sociology, which are now all relatively well-regarded sciences that we

(theorists) are supposed to cross pollinate to construct a comprehensive science of cognition or mentation. As a matter of intellectual history, the pragmatic conception of belief had its genesis in this explanatory paradigm, a paradigm Peirce and James found in Bain's two major works on the mind. A paradigm which is now beyond serious question within the academy.

III. PRAGMATISM AND BEHAVIORISM
Pragmatism is not behaviorism. According to this school of thought, the actions relevant to determining what an animal believes include both its bodily movements and those mental actions it can perform when entirely paralyzed.

The use of "attention" and "control" in the analysis allows the pragmatist to distinguish between our belief-guided actions on the one hand and, on the other hand, instincts, reflexes, mere habits, mindless routines, and relatively automatic reactions. To be fair, pragmatists have all along acknowledged the fuzziness of the boundary between action and reaction. Attention can be more or less divided; and practice enables growing levels of control over an action's trajectory. There are no sharp cutoffs. While acknowledging borderline cases, the pragmatist maintains that focusing attention on a stimulus and exerting control over our responses to it are the means by which we (and the other animals) bring our beliefs to bear on our thoughts and movements as they unfold over time. In consequence, full engagement is diagnostic for belief.

When they turn to the metaphysics of mind, pragmatists assume that an animal's mind is her nervous system and that states of her mind, including her beliefs, are "more or less" states of that mind/nervous system. In fact, Bain embraced a dual aspect theory according to which psychological and neurological predicates are used to pick out differing aspects of a single biological reality. Because of this equivalence between the mental and the neurological (however rough), we can usefully define an animal's beliefs at a given time as any state of an animal's nervous system that encodes information poised to guide a sufficiently extensive

range of those attentive, self-controlled actions available to her at that time. This makes belief "natural" in several important respects: belief evolved before humans, it manifests itself in processes that can be both observed and introspected, and it has both spatial location and temporal duration.

IV. THE UTILITY OF THE DEFINITION

Given the poor track record of conceptual analyses, one might doubt whether "belief" really can be defined. But from a pragmatic perspective, this depends on how we define "definition." Though the more famous pragmatists, from Bain to Quine, rejected many aspects of the traditional Kantian distinction between analytic and synthetic truths, and for this reason rejected a classical Platonic conception of definitions, pragmatists can coherently advance, embrace, and urge the adoption of definitions when we think we can gain something good from the endeavor. The pragmatic definition of belief articulated above is offered in this spirit. It is a solution to a problem or set of problems that arise in "real" life.

But this definition of "belief" cannot achieve the desired effect without augmentation. Bain's definition is not self-standing. Instead, a definition of "belief" is just one component of a pragmatic philosophy founded in a fleshed-out theory of belief and related phenomena. The meaning of the pragmatic definition, and the shape of the theory in which it plays its part, is further specified by applying the definition to cases, which is one of the main goals I pursue in *Belief*. And because "belief" is an exceedingly general term, with an exceedingly varied extension, there are an enormous number and variety of cases to consider. "Belief" is used in academic and non-academic contexts. It is used in philosophy of mind, epistemology, philosophy of language, and philosophy of religion; it is used in psychiatry, ethology, anthropology, and cognitive neuroscience; it is used in confessionals and poems and law courts and legislative chambers. It is used to report the news, recall ancient history, predict the weather, and anticipate the financial markets. So, the conceptual "wiggle room" between non-

deviant use of the expression and the minds or brains of those it describes is close to maximal.

As I argued above, defining "belief" is compatible with a thoroughgoing semantic holism in which the meaning of the term and the meanings of the terms used to define it are neither static nor fully given to speakers in advance, even those speakers who understand these terms sufficiently well to be credited with "speaking English" in any non-ideal sense. Semantic competence is compatible with significant indeterminacy. Of course, the meaning of "belief" must have a certain level of determinacy to enable communication. When a word could mean pretty much anything in a given context, a speaker must turn to other words, symbols, intonation, and gestures to use that word to communicate her thoughts or wishes. But though words must have relatively determinate standing meanings to enable communication, communication rarely requires precise coordination in the standing meanings speakers attach to a term. So, we shouldn't be surprised to discover differences in usage among native English speakers and corresponding differences in their "intuitions" about who believes what in cases both actual and hypothetical. Semantic indeterminacy of this kind isn't inherently problematic. But we have several reasons for wanting to lend "belief" further definition.

I've already described one of these reasons: we need determinacy to analyze cases of implicit racism (and implicit cognition more generally) in the moral and legal worlds. But an epistemic ideal known as "the unity of knowledge" premises a distinct, if connected, aim. Many of us would like a unified understanding of our minds, one that unites the cognitive sciences, including contemporary biology, with the conceptualization of one another we bring to bear when we explain our words and deeds in the course of daily life and therein make claims about what we do and don't believe or think. This is a real need precisely because we use claims about what someone thought or believed when acting to regulate or condition praise and blame, punishment and reward. As Aristotle remarked, the audience pities Oedipus because Oedipus *believed* he was killing one stranger and bedding another. If the

audience conceptualized Oedipus as knowingly killing his father and bedding his mother, they would experience outrage instead. Indeed, an audience will remain scandalized to a certain extent even if Freud instructs them to locate Oedipus's knowledge of his incestuous patricide "beneath" consciousness, however "consciousness" is given spatial interpretation. The same is true outside the theatre. If Bill thought he was bombing a terrorist training camp when he bombed a mosque, that's one thing. This is especially true if Bill's mistake was non-culpable because the terrorists disguised the mosque as a training camp to provoke the tragedy. We must mourn the loss of innocent life and so must Bill, but blame directed at Bill for the tragedy would be misplaced. It is quite another thing to say that Bill knew (and so believed) he was bombing the mosque, even if we locate that knowledge "deep down" in Bill's mind.

The beliefs implicated in these morally weighty actions and reactions are commonly described as "intentions in action." They capture the agent's understanding of what she is doing when acting in the manner under judgment. But these are not the only kinds of beliefs implicated in our judgment of one another. We care about what other people believe about us, and they care about what we believe about them. We need a definition of "belief" to help us think about these socially crucial conceptions in a consistent, coherent manner.

Of course, the meaning of "science" is itself a matter of philosophical dispute. But reflection on the use of "belief" in social life makes manifest a relatively clear sense in which the nature of belief is not a matter for science alone. Because our adoption of a definition of "belief" will impact our thinking about one another, we cannot responsibly answer questions about the nature of belief without considering the consequences of those answers on our lives together. And once we start evaluating these consequences of adopting a theory of the mind, we are no longer engaged in the science of mind proper. The relevance of "belief" to our interpersonal (or inter-animal) relationships lends theorizing about

the nature of belief both its pragmatic point and extra-scientific (indeed extra-academic) character.

It is with this end of unifying the sciences of the mind with social life that the pragmatists began their attempts to define "belief." Adopting a developmental perspective, Bain observed that mammals are born in action: sucking, swallowing, rooting, and so on. But belief does not guide these initial actions until some interruption or obstacle prevents instinctive behavior from serving an animal's need for nourishment, security, and affection. Because of inevitable environmental irregularities, an animal must draw on sensorimotor memories and expectations to gain control over its initial attempts to move and feed. As these memories and expectations are representations of its past and future actions and observations, they do "reference" a time beyond that at which they occur. Memories and expectations are therefore an animal's most basic beliefs. Human minds are indeed variations on this theme.

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NOTES

[1] Zimmerman, *Belief*, 110-111.

[2] See Gendler, "Alief and Belief."

[3] Bain, *Mental and Moral Science*, 372.

[4] See Russell, *Analysis of Mind*.

[5] See Ramsey, "Truth and Probability."

[6] Fodor took a different approach, later in life, when he argued against the utility of the Darwinian approach to both biopsychology and biology more generally (see Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini, *What Darwin Got Wrong*). But this work was sharply criticized by philosophers of biology and few analytic philosophers followed Fodor down this path.

[7] See Fodor, *Language of Thought*.

[8] See Fodor, *Language of Thought Revisited*.

Pragmatic Accounts of Belief and Truth:
A Response to Aaron Zimmerman's *Belief: A Pragmatic Picture*

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The following paper is part of an author-meets-critics session sponsored by the William James Society and delivered at the 2020 Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Philadelphia, PA. *William James Studies* is pleased to present this session for our readership's enjoyment.

E rrol Morris, the documentary filmmaker at whom Kuhn once threw an ashtray,[1] tells the story of Sviatoslav Richter, the concert pianist, and his pink plastic lobster.[2] It seems that, for a period in the early 1970s, Richter—who was suffering from depression—would bring a pink plastic lobster with him backstage before his performances. The lobster's presence, Richter wrote to his aunt, was necessary for him to perform (the lobster was in a box, so not obvious or alarming to others) despite making him feel a bit of a "fool." Morris imagines Richter's internal dialogue: "The lobster is a security blanket, a crutch. . . . It's only because I think I need the lobster that I really need it. But if I think I need the lobster, don't I really need it?"[3] As Morris notes:

> Isn't it enough that he thinks he needs the lobster? Isn't that the same thing as needing the lobster—thinking that you need something in order to do something? . . . Being able to do something means thinking, believing that you are able to do it. It's not enough to have the skill to play the piano. Something more is needed.[4]

That something more is *belief.*

I think it's pretty obvious that William James would like this story. James, after all, was a connoisseur of such accounts, which he would use—with great empathy—as evidence to illustrate and support his philosophical positions. The fact that Richter's belief is both very useful and the sort where believing it makes it true, should ring bells: James's theory of truth and his will to believe doctrine are just around the corner.

I. ZIMMERMAN'S PRAGMATIC ANTI-INTELLECTUALIST ACCOUNT OF BELIEF

I think Morris's story might also appeal to Aaron Zimmerman since it seems to mesh nicely with his account in *Belief: A Pragmatic Picture.* In the quote above, Morris suggests that belief is central to action. Knowing how to do something—like play Beethoven's Piano Sonata no. 32—isn't sufficient for actually doing it: in

addition, one must believe one can do it. Richter's ability to perform and the performance itself depended on him having a certain belief. Zimmerman, too, stresses the connection between belief and action, defending a dispositional account where belief "is a disposition to use information to guide our actions."[5] Belief is thus the crucial conduit between thought and action and, in fact, it is this function that defines what belief is: "Belief is canonically manifested in controlled, attentive information-guidance and can be distinguished from other mental/neural phenomena on this basis."[6] In other words, Richter's belief that he needed a pink plastic lobster to perform, combined with his belief that it was nearby, backstage, in a box, made his subsequent actions—his musical performance—possible. And making such actions possible is a main part of what beliefs do.

Zimmerman's targets are "intellectualist" accounts of belief: namely, those that "emphasize uniquely human psychological traits,"[7] that view belief as "acceptance for the sake of truth,"[8] or that equate "belief" with "regarded as true."[9] We can see some of the problems with the intellectualist account by considering Richter's case. Richter certainly seemed to believe that he needed the pink plastic lobster to perform—that is, he certainly seems to have had a *belief*—but it's much less clear that he "regarded it as true" that he needed the lobster to perform. After all, Richter describes feeling like a "fool" for bringing the pink plastic lobster backstage. On some level, he may have known he did not *really* need the lobster. Cases like these create daylight between the concept of belief and "regarding as true."

Lest we put too much emphasis on behavior that could seem a sign of pathology or mental illness—though this never stopped James—Zimmerman offers a thorough argument against intellectualism in the third chapter of his book. The argument goes like this:

1. If belief is defined as "regarding as true" then, because propositions are truth-bearers, this would mean the belief is intrinsically propositional.

2. But consider animals (many of which differ only in degree from humans).[10] The best way of explaining much animal behavior is in terms of animals having beliefs.[11] But animals don't have a concept of truth or believe *propositions.*[12]
3. So, if animals have beliefs (and we often act as if they do), then belief cannot be propositional and cannot be defined in terms of truth or as what we "regard as true."[13]
4. If belief isn't propositional, then the alternative is to think of belief as dispositional. Belief, as a result, should be defined in terms of action and will, not reason and intellect.[14]

Zimmerman makes many other points in addition, but the general strategy is to make space for a dispositional account by highlighting problems with intellectualism. The case against the intellectualist may not be completely airtight—one could argue that animals don't, in fact, have beliefs, and that we can explain animal behavior in other terms—but it's also not entirely clear what an airtight argument would even look like. On this point, Zimmerman suggests, following Carnap, that "the question of what definition of 'belief' to adopt is . . . an 'external' question, which cannot be answered on the basis of evidence and 'theoretical' reasoning alone."[15] Deciding on a definition of belief thus depends on pragmatic considerations— different definitions will have different practical consequences or be more or less useful—and so will be, in a rather profound way, "in part a question of how to live."[16]

So, what are some of the practical upshots of a dispositional account of belief? Unpacking this question is one of the book's strengths, providing vivid examples of how outwardly technical questions actually have very practical, intuitively compelling consequences. For example, as Zimmerman notes, which beliefs we ascribe to a person has implications for how we judge their character and actions. If someone performs poorly on an implicit association test, it's tempting to ascribe prejudicial beliefs to them, regardless of any explicit evidence to the contrary. Moreover, it might seem as if this follows directly from a dispositional account of belief; after all, if someone has a disposition to associate negative qualities with

a certain group of people, this might seem more than enough to ascribe prejudicial beliefs (perhaps "implicit" beliefs) to them.

Zimmerman, however, resists this conclusion: if belief is connected to *controlled* action, as he claims, then uncontrolled or implicit bias doesn't qualify as a belief. This would mean that someone who performs abysmally on an implicit bias test, despite professing to hold egalitarian positions (and especially if their behavior is egalitarian), doesn't hold prejudicial *beliefs* though they might have prejudicial *attitudes*; hence, Zimmerman's proposal is to "stop speaking of 'implicit beliefs' or 'unconscious beliefs' and to instead join social psychologists in talking of implicit racial *attitudes*."[17] The upshot of doing so is to recognize that beliefs and attitudes can diverge from each other:

> When divergence is discovered, we know the agent's mind is conflicted. According to our definition, this conflict is often best described as the agent's *believing* in racial equality while *construing* the members of other races in a manner that belies her beliefs.[18]

So, while we might find a person's attitudes disappointing, this doesn't necessarily shed light on their beliefs. And as long as their attitudes don't affect their actions, it's possible to take comfort in the fact that they don't hold prejudicial beliefs, with all that would entail for the moral fiber of their character.

This means that one of the practical upshots of a dispositional account of belief—or at least Zimmerman's version—is that it allows for a psychologically nuanced account of the connections between one's character, beliefs, and attitudes. This account, in turn, allows for a morally nuanced account of how to assess a person's character that distinguishes beliefs and attitudes. I find this conclusion pretty compelling, and it provides support for Zimmerman's claim that his dispositional account has practical implications that we need to examine when considering different definitions of belief.

These points also highlight how this is a *pragmatic* account of belief in two distinct senses. It's a pragmatic account because, first

of all, it defines belief in behavioral and dispositional terms *à la* James and Alexander Bain. But it's also pragmatic in the sense of pointing to what is practically at stake in how one defines the concept of belief—and why these practical stakes deserve philosophical consideration.[19]

James, too, was an opponent of "intellectualism"—he's known for sometimes calling it "vicious" intellectualism—though his target was somewhat different. For James, vicious intellectualism was the fallacy of "treating of a name as excluding from the fact named what the name's definition fails positively to include," a mistake he accused idealists such as Lotze, Royce, and Bradley, among others, of committing.[20] Put in somewhat clearer terms, James was criticizing the tendency to treat definitions as so complete and exhaustive that they exclude anything which either falls short of or overshoots the definition. For James, this meant accusing absolute idealists of paradox mongering;[21] for present purposes, we might wonder whether definitions of "belief" might be overly and viciously intellectualist in this sense, too. In particular, I'm concerned that Zimmerman's dispositional definition of belief—a definition I find compelling—has no room for the concept of truth.

II. A Mid-century Modern Digression
Zimmerman admits, rightly I think, that his account of belief is not a full-blown "theory."[22] Other pragmatists likewise avoid offering "theories" or "definitions" of philosophical concepts when doing so can lead to over-simplified or one-sided accounts. One alternative is to offer "pragmatic elucidations" of philosophical concepts that instead give "an account of the role the concept plays in practical endeavors."[23] We can find similar strategies in Wittgenstein (the idea that "meaning is use") and in ordinary language philosophy (e.g., Austin's reminder that, even though "ordinary language is not the last word. . . . only remember, it *is* the *first* word").[24] To shed light on its meaning, the general idea is to start with how a philosophical concept is used in practice. A good pragmatic elucidation requires balancing the variety of ways concepts are

actually used with the need to identify the core meaning that makes the concept philosophically interesting.

For example, consider Friedrich Waismann's pragmatic elucidation of belief in "Belief and Knowledge."[25] In this essay, Waismann claims that "belief" is an ambiguous term "having a multiplicity of meaning, an indefiniteness which we shall do well to bear in mind."[26] For example, Waismann notes that belief may be either "active" or "passive," verbalized or inarticulate, action-guiding or inert, dispositional or episodic.[27] Waismann even suggests that one can "believe a thing and, at the same time, believe the opposite,"[28] and he briefly mentions "certain queer belief-states such as described by James" where someone, perhaps while intoxicated, may "have a feeling of conviction heightened to an abnormal degree, and yet be totally unable to say what he is convinced of."[29] Waismann's point is that "belief" is used to refer to a variety of mental states: "it is almost as if different concepts were lodged in the same word-husk."[30] This is obviously not vicious intellectualism. According to Waismann, we're justified in calling many things "beliefs" even though they don't all fall under the same definition, precisely.

Having said that, some senses of "belief" do seem more paradigmatic than others, and Waismann claims that there is a "central meaning" to belief despite the variety of ways we use the term. The central meaning of "belief" is "'to hold it as true', 'to accept a statement as true', 'to acquiesce in its truth.'"[31] So, while Waismann isn't *viciously* intellectualist—he's comfortable with indefiniteness and ambiguity in our definition of truth—he *is* intellectualist in Zimmerman's sense by treating "acceptance for the sake of truth" as central to our understanding of what belief is.

I mention this because I think Waismann is onto something about the connection between belief and truth. (And not just Waismann: I suspect many pragmatists, Wittgensteinians, and ordinary language philosophers, among others, share or shared this view.) If so, this raises the possibility of being intellectualist without being *viciously* intellectualist.[32] But it all depends on what is meant

by "belief" and "truth," and it's here that, perhaps surprisingly, James might have something more to add.

III. PRAGMATIC BELIEF, PRAGMATIC TRUTH

Zimmerman makes his main argument against intellectualism in Chapter 3. In Chapter 5, he argues that the definition of belief can't be settled on purely theoretical or scientific grounds. Finally, in the last chapter, "Pragmatic Self-Deception," Zimmerman defends the position that we are sometimes entitled to "believe at will" despite knowing that what we believe isn't grounded in reality.[33] In some cases, this is because our beliefs might be "self-promoting": i.e., they are the sort of beliefs that become more likely true in virtue of being believed (many of James's examples in "The Will to Believe" are of this kind).[34] But in other cases, Zimmerman observes, it may simply be biologically adaptive to be "overly optimistic."[35] That is, having a certain belief doesn't make it more likely true, but it does make it easier to cope with, and perhaps persevere through, the many obstacles that life inevitably throws our way. To use Zimmerman's example, there may be value—and hence, one may be in some sense entitled—in believing that a medical test will come back with good news, or that one can beat a certain disease, even if one fully realizes that such beliefs are *not* self-promoting. While this may not seem scientific, Zimmerman follows James in denying that, in such cases, scientific standards should take priority: "If nothing is to be gained by reasoning in scientific ways and much to be lost, insisting that we must nevertheless reason scientifically borders on epistemic fetishism."[36] Richter, I suspect, would also agree. But in addition, as Zimmerman realizes, this amounts to severing the connection between belief and truth. While we should criticize lies and deception, Zimmerman concludes that "as the pragmatists have long insisted, respect for truth and evidence is not 'built into' the very nature of belief and credulity."[37]

But I think it matters very much what is meant, here, by truth. Properly understood—and by "properly" I mean "pragmatically"—a good case can be made for linking belief and truth. Not exactly in the way that "intellectualists" might connect them, but something

close. James, of course, had a lot to say about truth. Some of his more infamous claims support the relatively crass interpretation that James equates truth with utility.[38] (And, indeed, this was how many of his early critics, such as Russell and Moore, interpreted him.) But James also had many sober things to say about truth as well. For example:

> Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its veri-fication. Its validity is the process of its valid-ation. . . . True is the name for whatever idea starts the verification-process, useful is the name for its completed function in experience.[39]

In other words—at least on a somewhat charitable reading—James's pragmatic account of truth aims to do two things. First, it aims to describe what we *do* when we use the concept of truth and, second, it aims to give a pragmatic account of what truth means. James's answer to the first question is that we use the concept of truth to show our trust: to call a belief true is simply to signal that we consider it dependable, reliable, and solid enough to act upon. James's answer to the second question (at least when he is being a bit more careful) is that truth amounts to verification. When we say a belief corresponds to the facts, what we mean, pragmatically, is that it is verifiable. Verifiability is what *makes* a belief true.

The upshot of this is that James has a way of linking belief to truth while avoiding some of the more vicious forms of intellectualism. On James's view (as on Zimmerman's), beliefs are fundamentally about guiding action. The difference is that James treats those beliefs that successfully guide action as fully "true"—in fact, for James, this is simply what truth means. This suggests that a "respect for the truth" *is* built in to a pragmatic account of belief, at least to the extent that beliefs are supposed to lead to effective actions, and the successful outcome of such actions is what James means by truth. Put in other words, a belief that did not aim at some successful action—one that did not aim at the truth—would scarcely

deserve to be called a belief at all. ("Daydream" or "reverie" might be a better term.)

Of course, one might want nothing to do with James's theory of truth. Even if we read it charitably, it faces serious problems.[40] But there are other pragmatic accounts of truth, and some of these allow a built-in connection with belief. Examples aren't hard to find. Misak's version of a Peircean account of truth and Price's argument that truth introduces a "convenient friction" both present truth as a norm that defines assertoric discourse and inquiry more broadly.[41] Without the norm of truth, according to Price, assertions would not be assertions: rather, they would be more akin to idle musings or the uncritical restaurant reviews of a "community of dedicated lunchers."[42] Likewise, for Misak, truth functions as a norm that sets standards for how inquirers should conduct themselves:

> Once we see that truth and assertion are intimately connected—once we see that to assert that *p* is true is to assert *p*—we can and must look to our practices of assertion and to the commitments incurred in them so as to say something more substantial about truth.[43]

If truth is a norm of assertion or inquiry, as these "new" pragmatists argue, then it's not much of a leap to see it as a norm of belief as well—which would mean that respect for truth *would* be built in to the concept of truth. After all, it would be precisely this respect for truth, for getting things right, that makes a belief a belief.[44]

I'm not sure Zimmerman would be happy with this solution. Misak's conception of truth is broadly Peircean—truth means long-range durability—and Peirce is a defender of scientific rationality, so linking belief to a pragmatic theory of truth of this type might just be a way of reintroducing scientific rationality through the back door.[45] (Not surprisingly, this mirrors the differences between James and Peirce: James's impulse to equate truth with mere utility or subjective preference versus Peirce's view that truth is the final destination of sustained scientific inquiry.) But I'd like to suggest that there are still significant upsides to linking a dispositional account of belief with a pragmatic account of truth. As we saw

Zimmerman note, earlier, such practical benefits deserve consideration.

The first upside is that this combination preserves the intuition that "regarding as true" is part of the "central meaning" of belief. As Waismann and others have noted, belief and truth seem closely connected—though what exactly is meant by truth often goes unstated. The suggestion, here, is that by incorporating a pragmatic account of truth, this connection can be preserved without the negative side effects of intellectualist accounts. For example, if animals have beliefs, there's no impediment to their having true beliefs in addition: to use Zimmerman's example, if a dog believes its owner is nearby, and she is, then the dog has a true belief.[46] Does the dog "regard it as true" that its owner is nearby? In a strictly intellectualist sense, perhaps not, but if "regard as true" is taken in dispositional and behavioral terms, then this formulation seems unobjectionable. If "regarding as true" means acting as if a certain state of affairs holds, and if the dog acts as if its owner is nearby, then in this pragmatic sense the dog regards it as true that its owner is nearby. Still, it's probably undeniable that some will balk at redefining both belief and truth. My suggestion is to view this as a package deal.

This leads to the second upside of linking pragmatic accounts of belief and truth. As Zimmerman notes, lately there's been a lot of discussion about truth, the importance of truth, and the precarious role of truth in our current political climate.[47] No one would disagree that, as he puts it, "we must resist the blatant lies, fabrications, and inconsistencies of those demagogues who have the most to gain from a 'post-truth' society."[48] But Zimmerman is also concerned that we not "overreact to the propaganda that surrounds us today by pretending that social activity is itself a form of science."[49] Here I'd like to flag two concerns. The first, more obvious, point is that it seems we can generally use *more* science not less. Whether the topic is climate change, gun safety, or vaccinations, etc., there's a good case that being more scientific in our social and political activity would be beneficial. Moreover, this is a commitment many pragmatists are comfortable making. Historically, the most

prominent defender of a tight connection between democracy and science is Dewey, who saw the two as nearly synonymous as, for example, when he wrote that "democracy is only estimable through the changed conception of intelligence that forms modern science."[50] So, it seems plausible that more science, not less, is the prescription for an ailing democracy. Second, forging a close link between belief and truth provides an argument for the importance of truth that is independent of the practical value of believing truths over falsehoods. (After all, some false beliefs are quite useful.) The argument is simply this: if truth is a norm of belief (and assertion and inquiry), then a commitment to the truth is built in to what we do just about any time we open our mouths or have an action-oriented thought (i.e., a belief). Playing fast and loose with the truth doesn't just have corrosive practical consequences—consequences which might be debated, I suppose—but it actually betrays a certain kind of performative contradiction or fundamental incoherence. And, in a neat move, this latter point is not debatable because entering the debate manifests a commitment to the very norm supposedly in question.[51]

I'm under no illusions that philosophical arguments, by themselves, have significant practical consequences. (Though McIntyre has recently argued that some versions of postmodernism did have an outsized and mostly negative effect.)[52] But regardless of that, it's still good to get our philosophical house in order, and if a philosophical position entails greater respect for the truth then, all things being equal, that's a point in its favor. I'd suggest that's the case here. A pragmatic account of truth adds to the practical benefits of a pragmatic account of belief. Combining the two is just the pragmatic thing to do.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I began with Errol Morris's account of Sviatoslav Richter and the pink plastic lobster he carried around in the early 1970s. Morris observes that the ability to do something requires more than just skill: it also requires the *belief* that one has the ability to do it. Richter believed, for a time, that he needed the lobster to perform on

stage: this belief played a necessary role in his ability to perform certain actions. This is an evocative example of Zimmerman's thesis that belief is "a disposition to use information to guide our actions" and this action-guiding function defines what a belief is.[53]

But accepting this account of belief doesn't mean severing the connection with truth—especially if we approach truth in a similarly pragmatic fashion. Did Richter believe that it was true that he needed the pink plastic lobster? Earlier I suggested perhaps not: after all, he conceded feeling like a "fool" for having this belief. But we can now see how Richter regarded it as true that he needed the pink plastic lobster. After all, he believed he needed the lobster and went to some lengths to keep it close by. This wasn't a dream or a reverie or idle speculation on his part. The most straightforward explanation of the difference—between believing and idle speculation—is that Richter *regarded it as true* that he needed the lobster and for that reason was prepared to act to keep it close by, which he did. Pragmatically speaking, there is no difference between "believing" and "regarding as true": these mean the same thing. And that means we can enjoy the benefits of a dispositional account of belief *and* give truth the respect it deserves.

Zimmerman concludes his book with a plea that we "leave space for play, and hopeful belief, and trust."[54] I agree. I'd even add that there is space for pink plastic lobsters. But there is also space—lots of it—for truth.

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NOTES

[1] Errol Morris, *The Ashtray*.

[2] Morris, "The Pianist and the Lobster."

[3] Morris, "The Pianist and the Lobster."

[4] Morris, "The Pianist and the Lobster."

[5] Zimmerman, *Belief*, 81.

[6] Zimmerman, 98.

[7] Zimmerman, 19.

[8] Zimmerman, 43.

[9] Zimmerman, 43.

[10] "Dolphins figure things out for themselves. . . . They improve upon entrained practices, recognize these improvements for what they are, and share their innovations with peers and kin. These are paradigmatic processes of belief formation and transmission, and we're not the only apes to employ them" (47).

[11] "Nonhuman animals have beliefs. This is an obvious truth: a datum on which we can premise our inquiries" (44).

[12] "But though many animals represent each other's representations, only humans construct sentences and sort them into truths and falsehoods. So an analysis of belief in terms of propositions 'regarded' as true or accurate starts off on the entirely wrong foot. Belief is neither essentially nor invariably propositional" (44).

[13] "From the 'fact' that belief does not always have a propositional object, and from the 'fact' that believers needn't regard anything as true in holding their beliefs, we have derived the conclusion that believing does not entail believing-true" (46, fn).

[14] "If language isn't necessary for thought, it isn't necessary for belief in thought's conclusions. Since reasoning is (arguably) a series of thoughts culminating in a belief, language isn't necessary for reasoning, as Hume emphasized so long ago. Nor is language sufficient for thought. . . . The test, again, is action, not just words and feelings" (71).

[15] Zimmerman, 124.

[16] Zimmerman, 125. Or, as Zimmerman puts the point earlier: "Acceptance of the pragmatist definition of 'belief' is best seen as a philosophical choice among empirically equivalent but socially divergent alternatives. . . . If we adopt Bain's definition, we are choosing a picture to live by" (21).

[17] Zimmerman, 112.

[18] Zimmerman, 105.

[19] Zimmerman describes these as "ground-level" and "meta-level" theses: first, a ground-level analysis of what belief is and second, a meta-level claim about how to assess different ground-level definitions (98).

[20] James, *A Pluralistic Universe,* 32.

[21] Slater, "James's Critique of Absolute Idealism," 177.

[22] Zimmerman, 97. "While the pragmatic definition of 'belief' . . . is not without consequence for our thinking about actors and other animals, it would be unduly hyperbolic to describe it as a 'theory' of belief. Instead . . . [it] is best conceived as a placeholder for a family of theories of belief" (97).

[23] Misak, *New Pragmatists*, 68. See also Wiggins, "An Indefinabilist Cum Normative View," 317.

[24] Austin, "A Plea for Excuses," 11. Emphasis in original.

[25] I focus on Waismann because of his proximity both to Wittgenstein and Oxford ordinary language philosophy; plus, his work is not as well-known as it should be. Waismann had a very fraught relationship with Wittgenstein before ending up at Oxford during the heyday of ordinary language philosophy. "Belief and Knowledge" was written around 1950 but only published posthumously. For biographical details see McGuinness, "Waismann: The Wandering Scholar."

[26] Waismann, "Belief and Knowledge," 168.

[27] An "active" belief is one that is "the result of an activity," perhaps "the consequence of certain observations and reflections of my own"; a passive belief, in contrast, is one a person came to "without paying much

heed. . . . like a moist sponge" (168). Waismann's example of an "inarticulate" belief is to imagine "a man being forcibly dragged into a fire" (169)—he seems to have gotten this example from Wittgenstein. The man's mental state is "certainly much akin to belief" but is not the result of a process of reasoning. (Waismann also notes that animals may have beliefs in this sense.) "Inert" beliefs—unlike those that are "like a force . . . apt to discharge itself into action" (172)—lead neither to specific actions nor to general tendencies to act in certain ways. Waismann's example is a belief in Goldbach's conjecture where "no action will issue from that" (172). Finally, Waismann argues that belief is sometimes "episodic" in the sense of pointing to a specific situation rather than a general disposition: "at this moment I began to believe him" (171), he claims, makes perfectly good sense, suggesting that "there is an almost continuous line running from the one pole, the purely dispositional, to the opposite one, the purely episodic" (172).

[28] Waissman, 178.

[29] Waissman, 170.

[30] Waissman, 172.

[31] Waissman, 167.

[32] This moderate intellectualism might also be called "pseudo-intellectualism," but, unfortunately, the name is already taken.

[33] Zimmerman, 128-129.

[34] Zimmerman, 129.

[35] Zimmerman, 130.

[36] Zimmerman, 139. Zimmerman quotes James from *The Will to Believe*: "I simply refuse obedience to the scientist's command to imitate his kind of option, in a case where my own stake is important enough to give me the right to choose" (Zimmerman, 139).

[37] Zimmerman, 140.

[38] Such as: "you can say of it then either that 'it is useful because it is true' or that 'it is true because it is useful.' Both these phrases mean exactly the same thing." (James, *Pragmatism*, 98).

[39] James, 97, 98.

[40] For two of these see Campbell, *Experiencing William James*, and Misak, *The American Pragmatists*.

[41] See Misak, *Truth, Politics, Morality* and "Pragmatism and Deflationism," and Price, "Truth as Convenient Friction."

[42] Price, 177.

[43] Misak, *New Pragmatists*, 70.

[44] This sidesteps the question of whether belief is propositional, but pragmatists in general haven't been overly concerned with nailing down truth-bearers. Dewey, idiosyncratically, viewed truth as a property of judgments, not propositions, and Peirce's best-known description of truth frames it in terms of "opinions" ("the opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth").

[45] Misak, *Truth, Politics, Morality*, 49.

[46] Zimmerman, 59.

[47] See McIntyre, *Post-truth*, and O'Connor and Weatherall, *The Misinformation Age*.

[48] Zimmerman, 139.

[49] Zimmerman, 140.

[50] Dewey, "Intelligence and Morals," 39. Of course, Dewey tended to view science in broad and general terms and democracy as "more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" ("Democracy and Education," 93).

[51] Misak and Talisse, "Pragmatist Epistemology and Democratic Theory," makes the connection between belief and truth in the context of offering an epistemic defense of democracy:

> Our argument, which comes from the founder of pragmatism, C.S. Peirce, has it that aspiring to truth is a constitutive norm of belief. When we believe or assert something, we are claiming that it is true, and vice-versa. . . . [W]e see the conceptual tie between belief and truth-aspiration as providing a fundamental norm for epistemic conduct. If one finds that one's belief that *p* does not recede in light of evidence against *p*, one no longer is able to regard one's state with respect to *p* as properly a *belief*. In such cases, the diagnostic language of obsession, delusion, self-deception, and confabulation ought to be introduced to characterize the state in question. (367)

In their view, not only is truth a norm of belief, but a commitment to truth brings with it a commitment to democratic norms.

[52] See McIntyre, *Post-Truth*.

[53] Zimmerman, 81.

[54] Zimmerman, 140.

COMMENTS ON AARON ZIMMERMAN'S
BELIEF: A PRAGMATIC PICTURE

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The following paper is part of an author-meets-critics session sponsored by the William James Society and delivered at the 2020 Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Philadelphia, PA. *William James Studies* is pleased to present this session for our readership's enjoyment.

When philosophical views become entrenched orthodoxies, they are not seen as in need of defense; they are taken as obvious, as the fixed positions around which more contentious, disputed questions revolve. If one questions these orthodoxies, points out that certain views taken as assumptions need to be defended, and that certain views that have been dismissed as untenable are worthy of consideration, it is very difficult to get the philosophical community to take up such challenges. Most people in the position to decide what gets serious consideration have accepted certain views as settled.

Until very recently, this has been the case concerning certain matters related to the nature and norms of belief. While theorists would dispute the exact way to characterize the idea that beliefs "aim at truth," all would agree that belief is a paradigmatically *cognitive* state. What it means for a state or attitude to be cognitive, as opposed to conative or affective, theorists rarely make explicit, but a core idea is that such attitudes constitute *thinking* about the world in a way that can lead us to knowledge or to accurate representations. Despite differences in the way this state is characterized, it is commonly held that beliefs are evidence-sensitive, meaning that if one does not think one's belief is supported by one's evidence, one will cease to have the belief. Further "normativism" about belief has become very widespread among epistemologists. Here is Kate Nolfi's clear statement of the view:

> According to the normativist about the nature of belief, it is built into what it is to be a belief (as opposed to some other sort of mental attitude) that beliefs are subject to certain norms. In this sense, the normativist maintains that the nature of belief is normative . . . Any view maintaining that belief has a constitutive aim and so that some standard of success or correctness is built into the nature of belief itself is a version of normativism.[1]

So when Aaron Zimmerman counters this intellectualist tradition with a picture of belief which "is neither invariably nor essentially propositional,"[2] which denies that belief and desire occupy distinct domains,[3] and which states that "people often believe against the evidence in full awareness that this is what they are doing,"[4] he offers a radical view in the contemporary philosophical landscape.

In recent work, I have also questioned these orthodoxies, though I didn't see myself as putting forth an alternative picture of belief;[5] instead, I have seen my main task as exposing that what are put forth as descriptions about the concept of belief are actually normative, and disputable, claims about the value of certain kinds of beliefs over others. Zimmerman makes a similar point in Chapter 5, arguing that although science and common usage place some constraints on how we define belief, the answer to the question "What is belief?" is not entirely scientific, and there are normative implications to which picture one chooses.[6] For example, the intellectualist picture of belief may well have implications for the way we treat nonhuman animals. Many theorists of belief claim to offer neutral observations about our belief systems akin to those made by those studying our circulatory or digestive systems. But Zimmerman argues that beliefs, and so, beliefs about beliefs, are not best thought of like this; we have a kind of control over beliefs which resembles control we have over our actions.[7]

So, Zimmerman and I are on "the same side," so to speak, and I label my view a "pragmatist" one. While there are certainly Jamesian strands in it, I see the view I put forth as very influenced by Hume and begin my book with his words that "belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part our nature."[8] The sense in which my view is "pragmatist" is not primarily in its connection to classical pragmatism but in contrast with a position that has been termed "evidentialist," the view that there are only evidential reasons for belief. According to this taxonomy, anyone who thinks that one can believe for practical reasons is a pragmatist. This is Nishi Shah's way of dividing up the territory and has become standard usage in recent discussions about reasons for and norms of belief.[9] In this sense, when I first began

working on these issues, almost everyone was on the evidentialist side. This is now changing. The revisions I made last year to a 2012 encyclopedia entry on the ethics of belief made these changes apparent; there are now two sides to this debate, each with arguments to evaluate and references to cite.[10]

I am thus sympathetic to much of what Zimmerman says, but I also have a number of points of disagreement or resistance. It is always helpful to try to understand where and why I disagree with those who share a broadly similar outlook. The way I will bring these tensions into focus is by thinking about the implications of Zimmerman's view for the ethics of belief, though this is not the central focus of his book: I see the book's main focus as exposing the deep flaws of the intellectualist view. A second important focus is to make Alexander Bain's view, and its import in the pragmatist tradition, more well know. This latter focus is important in its own right as we all realize that who has made their (or mostly his) way into the cannon is largely based on the contingencies of history. Zimmerman devotes the longest chapter (over a quarter of the book) to making the idea of animals lacking belief (or only having impoverished or lesser beliefs) seem absurd. But the book discusses the normative implications of the view throughout, most explicitly in Chapter 6, the book's shortest chapter, and here is where I desire more clarity. I will pose three related questions on this topic.

I.   WHAT OUGHT WE TO BELIEVE?

At the end of the introductory chapter, Zimmerman says he will argue against the "epistemic scolds" of the evidentialists who say it is not okay to believe for pragmatic reasons.[11] He says: "Sometimes, we can ignore the evidence and believe what we want to believe knowing full well this is what we are doing. The will to believe is real. Within limits, it can even be a good thing."[12] When elaborating on this view, he says a certain kind of scientific reasoning and "credence calibration" that only considers probabilities has its place in many contexts but that this "is compatible with the undoubtedly reasonable view of the matter that patients and their families do not apportion their credences to the evidence and even *ought not* do

so."[13] What is the nature or force of such "ought" claims? Zimmerman spends some time critiquing a certain view about what one ought or ought not believe. Evaluative judgments that go "beyond the controlled, attentive behavior of those she is judging" and are instead targeted at my character or "deep self," he says "should be kept out of the courts. . . . They are not at all helpful when we are trying to interact with a community of persons each one of whom thinks she is due the respect of the others."[14] Pragmatists "have little tolerance for institutionalized judgments of character, and little use too for psychological taxonomies that justify them."[15]

This talk of courts and institutions is somewhat extreme and distracting. Most theorists do not think doxastic criticism (which some call blame) carries this kind of force with it. They claim instead that one can be criticized when one's belief falls short of a certain standard according to the norms of the epistemic domain. To be sure, many claim that violation of these norms matters in a more substantial sense than violation of more "conventional norms" such as those of etiquette (and I think their attempts at such differentiation ultimately fail), but their scolds are not that fierce, and they would not think, as Zimmerman sometimes characterizes them, that such violations are worthy of any punishment.

Now Zimmerman has rejected the idea that these so-called epistemic norms are the ones to which beliefs are beholden. What is the source of normativity, then, that these ought statements appeal to? Is it the same "ought" that refers to action? This has been my view, but while he says that the involuntary nature of many of our beliefs does "not reflect a distinction in kind between belief and action," he also says, "Of course, belief is not itself an action."[16] But given that beliefs often result from various voluntary mental actions, he says one can sometimes "defend her act of believing."[17] Are beliefs, then, only subject to criticism in those rare contexts where you have it within you to believe "at will"? And, again, what is the target and nature of the criticism? Further, are these "oughts" those of obligation, or are they permissive? If the family of a patient reasons in the scientific manner, are they doing something wrong,

or is it the weaker claim that they are permitted to believe in a way that deviates from the scientist?

II. ARE WE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT WE BELIEVE?

Some are skeptical as to whether there is anything worthy of being called an ethics of belief, given belief's seemingly involuntary nature. Zimmerman clearly thinks that this passive view of belief is wrongheaded: "Questions about the nature of belief are inextricably bound up with concerns about autonomy. . . . Beliefs differ from instinct and habits, because they are manifest in our attentive and self-controlled activities."[18]

While I agree we exercise agency in believing as we do, this idea is somewhat in tension with his view that nonhuman animals have beliefs that do not differ substantially from human ones. Do we see the same kind of decisions and autonomy about what to believe, and so hold nonhuman animals responsible for what they believe, in the same sense? Or, in the end, is it not beliefs we are responsible for but instead "various acts of belief-formation, entrenchment, retention, resurrection, and the like?"[19] At times, it seems like Zimmerman wants to resist that these can be pulled apart. Is the idea that when "we" have a choice about how to integrate information into our activities then "we" can be held responsible, but these choices are only possible for certain kinds of creatures? And again, while at times it seems that Zimmerman thinks this freedom is quite widespread, saying that "people can believe what they want to believe because they want to believe it,"[20] he also says that his pragmatic definition articulates a conception of belief that is only "voluntarist" in a limited sense.[21] I would like to have a better understanding of Zimmerman's view of the nature and extent of doxastic agency.

III. CAN PRACTICAL REASONS JUSTIFY BELIEF?

The claim that there are no practical reasons for belief is a surprisingly common one made by theorists. In thinking about different kinds of reasons, some will say there are those that pertain to belief (called epistemic or theoretical) and those pertaining to

action (called practical), and that these are completely exclusive domains. When the claim that there are no practical reasons for belief is developed or defended, it is usually modified so that what is being denied is the possibility of a quite specific phenomenon. All will admit that practical considerations, in fact, can contribute causally to what one believes. Many will even say that such considerations can count as reasons for these subjects *to* believe and, again, such reasons may partially cause the beliefs. What they deny, however, is that these non-evidential reasons are reasons *for which* these subjects believe; beliefs, they say, cannot be *based* on such reasons. Sometimes this is put in terms of "motivating reasons"; it is argued that one cannot, in full awareness, recognize that one is believing for practical reasons.

The question of whether beliefs can be based on practical reasons needs to be divided into two separate questions. The first is: Can one take oneself to believe for practical reasons? The further question is: Can it be correct, proper, or rational to believe for practical reasons? Even if I succeed in convincing someone to answer the first question affirmatively, they still may resist the idea that such reasons can ever be good ones.

Zimmerman doesn't often put things in the language of reasons or rationality, but as I mentioned earlier, he does end his first chapter by saying it can sometimes be a good thing to believe for practical reasons and that one can know full well that this is what they are doing, thus seeming to answer "yes" to both questions. The example he gives is from his own life, where he decided to believe that his daughter did not have a tumor and that surgery would not be necessary. His belief was not based on evidence; indeed, he did not seek out evidence about probabilities or base rates to justify his belief. Zimmerman calls his belief "epistemically irrational," but is it rational in some other sense?[22] Does he want to say it is sometimes good to be epistemically irrational? If so, what delineates the good cases from the bad ones?

When I have described similar kinds of cases of believing for practical reasons, I am often met by skepticism that the attitude described is *really* belief. Some would sometimes suggest that what

I call belief in these contexts is better described as hope. While I, like Zimmerman, have resisted the idea that belief and desire occupy completely separate domains, one way that I have distinguished beliefs from desires or hopes is by the way they feel. Beliefs include an endorsement and commitment that hopes do not. The preface of his book begins with a series of questions posed to the reader in the form: "Do you believe x?" Any affirmative response to such questions includes regarding the proposition contained in the question as true. If the question is "do you hope x?", no commitment to truth is needed.

I am not sure Zimmerman would accept this distinction and, if not, how does he distinguish the hope that his daughter would not need surgery from the belief that she would not? Given the powerful effects of hope, it seems all the behavior of the day he describes—where he focused his energies and attention—could result from hope. Indeed, he ends the book by saying we need to leave space for "hopeful belief."[23] What does that mean, and again how do we go about figuring out when such beliefs are to be encouraged and when they are not?

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NOTES

[1] Nolfi, "How to Be a Normativist," 181.

[2] Zimmerman, *Belief: A Pragmatic Picture,* 44.

[3] Zimmerman, 80.

[4] Zimmerman, 134.

[5] McCormick*, Believing Against the Evidence,* especially the first chapter.

[6] Zimmerman, 127.

[7] Zimmerman, 101.

[8] Hume, *Treatise*, 183.

[9] See Shah, "A New Argument for Evidentialism."

[10] McCormick, "Ethics of Belief."

[11] Zimmerman, 21.

[12] Zimmerman, 21.

[13] Zimmerman, 139.

[14] Zimmerman, 114, 119.

[15] Zimmerman, 118.

[16] Zimmerman, 85.

[17] Zimmerman, 86.

[18] Zimmerman, 122.

[19] Zimmerman, 86.

[20] Zimmerman, 39.

[21] Zimmerman, 85.

[22] Zimmerman, 136.

[23] Zimmerman, 140.

No Hope for the Evidentialist:
On Zimmerman's *Belief: A Pragmatic Picture*

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The following paper is part of an author-meets-critics session sponsored by the William James Society and delivered at the 2020 Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Philadelphia, PA. *William James Studies* is pleased to present this session for our readership's enjoyment.

While Aaron Zimmerman's *Belief* is rightly subtitled "*A Pragmatic Picture,*" it concerns a set of topics about which pragmatists themselves are not always in agreement. Indeed, while there has been a noticeable pushback against evidentialism in contemporary analytic epistemology, the view can at times seem ascendant within the literature on pragmatism itself.[1] In particular, Peirceans tend to presuppose something closer to evidentialism when they accuse Jamesians of taking pragmatism in an unproductive and irrationalist direction.[2] Consequently, while Zimmerman rightly suggests that we can expect to find "epistemic scolds" outside the pragmatist camp, James (and Jamesians) is all too familiar with such "in house" scolding from Peirce and his followers.[3]

Zimmerman notes that both Peirce and James seem to make heavy use of Bain's work on belief, where "preparedness to act upon what we affirm is admitted on all hands to be the sole, the genuine, the unmistakable criterion of belief."[4] Indeed, Peirce went so far as to claim that pragmatism was "scarce more than a corollary" of Bain's account.[5] Nevertheless, even if Peirceans claim to adopt something like the pragmatist *descriptive* view about what beliefs are,[6] they differ considerably from James and Zimmerman on certain *normative* issues about when belief is an appropriate attitude to take.[7] (Though it will be argued below that these descriptive and normative views can be difficult to combine.)

This split goes back at least as far as Peirce's reaction to James's "The Will to Believe," which Peirce "scorned"[8] as a view that said "Oh, I could not believe so-and-so, because I should be wretched if I did."[9] Pragmatists of the more Peircean bent have shared this scorn for the suggestion that our beliefs could be justified for pragmatic reasons, but Zimmerman's book gives us reason to think that we should take a Jamesian rather than a Peircean approach to these issues.

Indeed, Zimmerman's central claim, "To believe something at a given time is to be so disposed that you would use that information to guide those relatively attentive and self-controlled activities you might engage in at that time, whether these activities involve bodily

movement or not," applies directly to this "in house" dispute among us pragmatists over the question of whether we should be allowed to believe in things when we aren't evidentially compelled.[10]

In particular, Zimmerman gives us a detailed and well-motivated proposal about the connection between belief and action. As a result, those who think that some epistemically less-committed attitude is what we should adopt in the sorts of cases James focuses on need to show (1) how the (dispositions to) action(s) associated with this alternative attitude are relevantly different from the ones associated with belief and (2) how these (dispositions to) action(s) can do the practical work that belief does in James's cases.

REGULATIVE ASSUMPTIONS AND SELF-PROMOTING BELIEFS
There are two sorts of cases that James focuses on when he criticizes the sort of evidentialism that Peirce never lost sympathy for.
> (1) Those cases where believing *P* in advance of compelling evidence for *P* contributes to the ultimate success of our epistemic practices.
> (2) Those cases where believing *P* in advance of compelling evidence for *P* contributes to the truth of *P* itself.

James presents us with the most explicit case of the first type by asking us to imagine a God who only revealed themselves to those who had faith in God's existence already,[11] but cases of this type (or at least closely related to it) run through James's work, most notably in his discussion (in, among others, "The Sentiment of Rationality" and "The Will to Believe") of the importance of "faith" in the uniformity of nature, or in truth itself, for our scientific practice.[12] Peirce very much focuses on such attitudes as well.

In particular, Peirce thinks there are a number of presuppositions necessary for us to engage in various types of inquiry, and so, even if inquiry could ultimately produce evidence for them, they would still need to be accepted in advance of the evidence. Misak describes his position as follows:

> [Peirce] thinks that there are "regulative assumptions" that we have to accept. For instance, we must assume that, in general, our

observations can be explained and that there are real things whose characters are both independent of our beliefs about them and can be discovered through empirical investigation.[13]

Similar "indispensability arguments" relate to our need to assume things like the law of bivalence, the existence of the external world, or the uniformity of nature. Transcendentalists like Royce thought that our need to presuppose such things was grounds for thinking the relevant propositions to be necessarily true. James, a committed fallibilist, doubted the necessary truth of such presuppositions but still saw the essential role they played in our practice (and lack of compelling evidence against them) as underwriting our entitlement to believe them. Peirce, on the other hand, took even this position to be too strong. As Misak puts it, "Peirce was himself very interested in the indispensable. But he disagreed with James's idea that if we need something to be true, that warrants us in believing that it is true."[14] In the absence of compelling evidence, we are not entitled to believe such assumptions, and we should only "hope" that they were true. In Peirce's words, "When we discuss a vexed question, we *hope* that there is some ascertainable truth about it, and that the discussion is not to go on forever and to no purpose."[15] For instance, while some might think we are entitled to actually *believe* that every proposition is either true or false, Peirce's view is, according to Misak, only that:

> for any matter into which we are inquiring [we must assume that] we would find an answer to the question that is pressing on us. Otherwise, it would be pointless to inquire into the issue: "the only assumption upon which [we] can act rationally is the hope of success" (CP 5.357; 1868). Thus we need to assume the principle of bivalence for any p, p is either true or false—holds for any question into which we are inquiring.
>
>   But it is important to see that Peirce does not want to make any claim about special logical status (that the principle of bivalence is a logical truth); nor even that it is true in some plainer sense; nor that the world is such that the principle of bivalence must hold. The

principle of bivalence, Peirce says, is taken by logicians to be a law
of logic by a "saltus"—by an unjustified leap.[16]

Like those who thought we were only entitled to "working
hypotheses" in such cases,[17] Peirce took there to be another, more
epistemically modest attitude that could take the place of belief and
underwrite our practices just as effectively.

Misak herself admits that "there will be questions in the air about
whether the propositional attitude envisioned by Peirce is one that
makes good sense," but she doesn't really make an effort to answer
such questions.[18] Her inclination to sidestep this issue shouldn't be
surprising, since the requisite attitude *is* (at least if you are a
pragmatist) hard to make sense of. The resolute "Cartesian" could
argue that there could be an attitude that guides our behavior exactly
like beliefs do, but as long as you withheld the mental affirmation
"that's true" from it, it would never rise to the status of being a
belief. On this more Cartesian view of belief, being a belief rather
than, say, a working hypothesis, is solely a matter of having
something like a gold star mentally attached to it, and the
evidentialist can argue that it is precisely this practice of mentally
assigning gold stars that needs to be exclusively constrained by our
evidence.

However, pragmatists are more inclined to think that if it looks
like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it
probably *is* a duck, and I think it's a good question whether we can
make sense of such attitudes that are meant to take the role of belief
without actually being them. After all, just what could this "rational
hope" be that distinguished it from belief? The assumption seems to
be that in such cases the information associated with such rational
hopes is guiding our controlled and attentive behavior (as inquiry is
controlled and attentive, if anything is), so why shouldn't we treat
the information as believed? Just refusing to say "yes" when asked
if you believe something doesn't seem like enough to make you stop
believing it, and it may seem to veer perilously close to the sorts of
"paper doubts" that Peirce accuses Cartesians of promoting when he

enjoins us to "not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts."[19]

Of course, if the attitude in question *really* was just *hope*, then there wouldn't be such a question of making sense of the behavioral differences. However, given what the behavioral differences between belief and hope are, it seems clear that actual hope, at least as it's commonly understood, can't play the role Peirce needs for it here. For instance, when I buy a lottery ticket, I certainly hope that I will win, but I most certainly don't believe it, and my behavior clearly manifests this difference. If I actually believed that I would win, I'd buy a new computer, start looking for a new apartment, and do a whole host of things which my hope doesn't lead me to do. Hoping that *P* is true is possibly entailed by, but certainly does not entail, believing that *P* and hoping that you are right, and it may be this latter combination of attitudes, which includes belief as a component, that we should actually expect in many of these regulative cases.[20]

While hope can seem too weak for our regulative ideals, its failure as a replacement for belief is even more manifest in the second group of cases that James discusses. James famously focuses on the case of a mountain climber whose confidence that he can make a perilous leap over a yawning chasm contributes to his success in making it,[21] and Zimmerman presents a similar case that lays out some of its important features a little more clearly:

> Imagine that you're scheduled to compete against nine opponents in a running race, opponents you know to be similar to you in both speed and endurance. Indeed, suppose that you have run exactly one hundred races against these very opponents and that each one of you has won exactly ten of these one hundred events. But here's something else that you know: prior to running the ten races that you managed to win, you were firmly convinced that you would win. A quick survey of your opponents reveals their similarity in this regard: each of them was firmly convinced that she would win on those occasions on which she won. A pattern emerges: when a runner among the ten is convinced she will win, she still more often loses than wins. (It has always been the case that three or more

runners were convinced they would win, and who wins among them is for all intents and purposes random.) But no runner wins unless she believes outright that she will prevail.[22]

In these "self-promoting" cases, it's precisely *confidence* in the truth of *P* that is important, and I can *hope* that *P* occurs without being confident in it at all.[23] If for some reason I was forced into a boxing match with Mike Tyson, I might *hope* to make it out of the first round, but I wouldn't believe that I would, and indeed, I'd be almost certain that I wouldn't. (And to return to the Zimmerman example above, while *every* runner probably "hopes" they will win, it is only the ones that *believe* they will win that ever do.)

Misak suggests that it's merely a "side-issue" whether "adopting this kind of attitude towards the proposition 'this chasm is jumpable' . . . would be sufficient to instill the confidence required to successfully jump the chasm."[24] However, even if it is a side issue to the purely *exegetical* question of whether Peirce "pulls apart the desirability of *p*'s being true from the rationality of believing *p* or from the likelihood of its truth," if we are looking in to the *plausibility* of the view Peirce purportedly endorses, the question remains central.[25] Furthermore, the answer to the question of whether hope can do requisite work here is pretty clearly, "no." Misak doesn't really address this worry any further, pawning the question off on Santayana, who seems to just miss James's point, essentially denying that such self-promoting cases exist when he argues:

> Why does belief that you can jump a ditch help you to jump it? Because it is a symptom of the fact that you could jump it, that your legs were fit and that the ditch was two yards wide and not twenty. A rapid and just appreciation of these facts has given you your confidence, or at least has made it reasonable . . . otherwise you would have been a fool and got a ducking for it.[26]

Santayana's analysis is pretty weak even in James's scenario, but when applied to Zimmerman's version, it's even clearer just how flawed it is. If three of the ten runners believe they will win in a

given race, and all three have the same evidence (and thus the same "rapid and just appreciation of the facts"), then it's hard to see how the winner could be any more reasonable in their belief than the other two "fools" who get whatever turns out to be the runner's equivalent of a "ducking."

The same sorts of worries come up for "working hypotheses," "assumptions," or the other attitudes typically presented as the more epistemically responsible alternatives to belief in these cases. All these attitudes seem too weak, and so we need something a little more potent to take the place of the self-promoting belief in these contexts.

On the other hand, if the evidentialist can find an attitude that can do all the work of belief in these cases, then it isn't entirely clear why we shouldn't go for a more rigorous evidentialism and adopt this new mystery attitude in place of many of our other everyday beliefs, such as that the Roman Empire conquered Greece before they conquered Gaul, that Philadelphia is famous for its cheesesteak, or that there is milk in my fridge. If, as pragmatists assume, we are *fallible* about most, if not all, topics, and if there is an epistemically more modest, but still practically effective, alternative attitude that we could live our lives by, why wouldn't taking on this attitude more generally be the epistemically responsible thing?[27] The Peircean thus seems to face a dilemma. If the mystery attitude is substantially weaker than belief, then it can't do the work we need it to do for our regulative assumptions and self-promoting beliefs, but if it *isn't* substantially weaker than belief, we face the question of why adopting it more globally isn't the more rational thing to do.

BELIEF AND CONTEXT
One might be able to avoid this dilemma by suggesting that what distinguishes belief from the mystery attitude is not so much its *strength* as its *scope*. As Peirce puts it, "Belief does not make us act at once, but puts us into such a condition that we shall behave in some certain way, when the occasion arises."[28] Beliefs guide our behavior in all situations, while the new mystery attitude may be more contextually constrained. As Zimmerman puts it:

> A full belief is poised to guide any attentive, well-regulated action or deliberation to which it might prove relevant. States of acceptance, assumption, and pretense are more circumscribed in their effects.[29]

So, to use another example from Zimmerman, Daniel Day Lewis doesn't *believe* he is Abraham Lincoln, since the "I'm Abraham Lincoln" information only guides some of his behavior (his acting in the scene and some of his behavior on set [answering to "Mr. Lincoln," etc.]), while it does not produce other behavior that the real belief would (such as refusing to shoot scenes for this Spielberg fellow because he has a country to run).

Perhaps James's mountain climber needs to be confident that he can make the jump at the time, but the Peircean could still say this attitude would ideally be something other than full belief. In particular, it could be something that strongly motivated him in this particular situation, but if the climber looked at the chasm in a less desperate context (say, there was a safe and clear alternate route to the other side available), then it wouldn't prompt him to try to make the jump (even if doing so would save him some time).[30] In much the same way, the sports team should be confident that they will win on game day, but should be less confident on training days so that they are still motivated to improve, etc.

Regulative assumptions could be explained the same way: we have an attitude that governs our behavior when we engage in a particular activity governed by the assumption, but we let the attitude go when the context changes. (When we play soccer, we act like we can't touch the ball with our hands, but this "belief" disappears once the game stops.) To explain how we could fail to believe the assumptions that govern our inquiry (bivalence, the existence of the external world), we argue that these attitudes motivate us when we are inquiring, but we can drop them whenever we are not. Of course, the fact that inquiry is such a pervasive aspect of our lives makes this line a little hard to defend since there is some sense in which we are always inquiring. We always seem to behave

as if there is an external world, and if we are always in that context, it's hard to say that the attitude in question isn't one of belief. That said, a more piecemeal approach to these issues might work for *some* regulative assumptions, just not for those assumptions that are tied to the practices "at the very heart of what we think makes us human."[31]

For instance, Misak suggests that we need to assume the bivalence holds for any *P* when we inquire into it, but that is a far cry from assuming it to be true *generally*. One could, for instance, imagine a group who assumed there were determinate answers to particular questions in the context of their investigating those very questions, but for other questions, or for those times when they weren't engaged in investigation, the "pretense" drops. They may assume there is a determinate answer to the question of whether there was more than one shooter in the Kennedy assassination when they are actively investigating the question, but when they are not, they happily admit there may be no fact of the matter, and they have no inclination to treat as bivalent the questions they are not inclined to ever pursue, such as, say, whether or not Caesar had more than seven illegitimate children. One can imagine such a group, but it pretty clearly isn't us, and it seems doubtful that we would be better off moving to such a practice. This wouldn't be an issue if our commitment to bivalence had to be "wholesale" rather than "piecemeal," so that to inquire effectively into *any* question at all, we needed to assume that bivalence held for *all* possible questions, but if our commitment to bivalence needed to be wholesale in this way, the evidentialist would lose their main ground for saying that it could be something other than belief.

Furthermore, such attempts to explain the mystery attitude in terms of something like Zimmerman's analysis of pretense hits a bit of a snag when we consider a different stream of explanations for why our attitudes don't motivate us to act in every context. In particular, one could argue that the change in contexts affects us in a way that changes us from believing that *P* to no longer believing so. Our failure to be disposed to react in a *P*-informed manner in context *B* may not show that we didn't really *believe* that *P* in

context *A*, it might have just shown that what we believe can change when our context does. Zimmerman highlights this in his discussion of how he believed his daughter's diagnosis would be favorable in spite of having no particular evidence for thinking so. In the face of doubts about whether he *really* believed this, and about whether he would really be inclined to bet some gifted cash on that prognosis if given the chance, Zimmerman responds:

> How does my disposition to acquire the relevant evidence and bet on its basis in this imagined scenario relate to my actual frame of mind when waiting for the results of my child's MRI? Is an assessment of my betting behavior in this hypothetical scenario an accurate measure of my actual (non-hypothetical) frame of mind during the interval in question?[32]

His answer to this rhetorical question seems to be "no," and there do intuitively seem to be cases where what we believe switches from context to context.[33] (And not just in the obvious sense in which some contexts would include counterevidence to the belief in question.) Perhaps the climber does believe when faced with a perilous, if necessary, leap, but would come to doubt it if he had the luxury of approaching the question in a more disinterested fashion. Or perhaps he would have doubted his belief if his partner had broken up with him that morning or if he had recently gotten some depressing news about his mother's health. The fact that his disposition would be affected by the occurrence of such things (all of which could relate to what James considers our "passional nature"[34]) doesn't mean that it's not really a belief that is there when such things don't occur.

   We seem pulled in two directions here. On the one hand, belief seems to be determined not just by what it actually makes us do but also (mainly) by the things it would make us do in various possible situations, and an attitude can be understood as pretense (or some non-believing attitude) rather than belief if it fails to inform our behavior outside of its preferred contexts. On the other hand, there are some (many) possible situations where we seem more inclined to say that the attitude has changed rather than remained but without

affecting behavior in the way that belief would. I'm not sure if there is a sharp line between the cases where we don't see something as a full belief because it doesn't inform our actions in certain contexts and the cases where some belief of ours simply changes when we move from one context to another and are less sure where to draw the line if there is a sharp one. Zimmerman's book has done much to clarify these issues, and hopefully the framework it gives us will ultimately allow us to make sense of this distinction too.

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N<small>OTES</small>

I'd like to start by thanking John Capps and the William James Society for organizing the session for which this paper was originally written, and Aaron Zimmerman for producing such a rich and rewarding book.

[1] Zimmerman's book would certainly be an example of this trend, as would be McCormick, *Believing Against the Evidence,* and others such as Rinard, "Against the New Evidentialists," "Equal Treatment for Belief," and "Believing for Practical Reasons."

[2] I'll be focusing here on Misak, "Pragmatism and Indispensability Arguments," but her take on the relation of Peirce and James on this issue seems fairly standard, as it is one of the key planks in the narrative that

casts Peirce as the "good" pragmatist and James as the "bad" pragmatist. That narrative goes back to Peirce himself, and in addition to Misak, one can see versions of it in, among others, Mounce, *The Two Pragmatisms,* and Talisse and Aiken, *Pragmatism: A Guide for the Perplexed*.

[3] Zimmerman, *Belief*, 83.

[4] Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, 505. One sees echoes of this, in, among other places, James's claim that "The test of belief is willingness to act" (James, *The Will to Believe*, 76) or Peirce saying that "[Readiness] to act in a certain way under given circumstances and when actuated by a given motive is a habit; and a deliberate, or self-controlled, habit is precisely a belief" (Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 5.480, 330; Hereafter *CP*.).

[5] "[Green] often urged the importance of applying Bain's definition of belief, as 'that upon which a man is prepared to act.' From this definition, pragmatism is scarce more than a corollary . . ." (Peirce, *CP* 5.12: 1906).

[6] Though it will be argued below that their talk of the role of "hope" in our mental economy sits very uncomfortably with such views.

[7] Particularly James "The Sentiment of Rationality" and "The Will to Believe" in James, *The Will to Believe* and the sixth chapter of Zimmerman's book.

[8] Misak, "Pragmatism and Indispensability Arguments," 264.

[9] Peirce, *CP* 5.377: 1877.

[10] Zimmerman, *Belief*, 1.

[11] James, *The Will to Believe*, 31.

[12] James, 26–7, 76–77.

[13] Misak, "Pragmatism and Indispensability Arguments," 265.

[14] Misak, 264.

[15] Peirce, CP 2.113: 1902, cited in Misak, "Pragmatism and Indispensability Arguments," 265.

[16] Misak, "Pragmatism and Indispensability Arguments, 265. We have altered the source for the Peirce quotation from the Indiana edition to that of the Collected Papers.

[17] See, for instance, Russell. Similar work is done by proposed attitudes like "acceptance" in Van Frassen, who claims that we should accept our scientific theories but not believe them to be true.

[18] Misak, "Pragmatism and Indispensability Arguments," 266.

[19] Peirce, CP 5.265: 1868.

[20] One can see this tension in Hookway's remark that "to show that a belief is unavoidable for us gives us no reason to believe that it is true" (Hookway, "Modest Transcendental Arguments," 181). While Misak takes Hookway to be suggesting that an attitude's unavoidability "provides a strong reason for hoping that it is true and for regarding it as legitimate in our search for knowledge" (Misak, *American Pragmatists*, 52), it does seem to be the case that if the belief that *P* is "unavoidable" *then you believe that P* and can't merely "hope" it.

[21] James, *The Will to Believe*, 80.

[22] Zimmerman, 128.

[23] To use the apt terminology of Zimmerman, 129.

[24] Misak, "Pragmatism and Indispensability Arguments," 273.

[25] Misak, 273.

[26] Santayana, "Character and Opinion," 61. Quoted approvingly in Misak, "Pragmatism and Indispensability Arguments," 267; *American Pragmatists*, 148; *Cambridge Pragmatism*, 63.

[27] Peirce occasionally leans in this direction when he says things like "what is properly and usually called belief . . . has no place in science at all" (Peirce, *CP* 1.635: 1898).

[28] Peirce, *CP* 5.373: 1877.

[29] Zimmerman, 96.

[30] In much the same way, Peirce's general who, because he "has to capture a position or see his country ruined, must go on the hypothesis that there is some way in which he can and shall capture it" (Peirce, *CP* 7. 219; 1901, cited in Misak, "Pragmatism and Indispensability Arguments," 266), ideally wouldn't *believe* this assumption, since if the necessity of capturing the position were to disappear, he might decide that the position is effectively impregnable and not attack it. If he really believed, he might allow potential reinforcements to go to areas that "really" needed them, rather than bolstering his own.

[31] Misak, "Pragmatism and Indispensability Arguments," 266.

[32] Zimmerman, 137.

[33] To take a familiar example, someone may believe in God in church but not believe in God in the lab. The "information" guides their behavior in one context and not in the other. Someone who gets "caught up" in the service and has their faith excited by the believers around them is clearly different from someone who just pretends to believe when they are in

church itself, even if both seem guided by the information only in the context of being in the church itself.

[34] James, *The Will to Believe*, 20.

Pragmatism, Truth, and the Ethics of Belief

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Whhat is it to believe something? Though much of what we believe is false, must we nevertheless "aim at the truth" in believing what we do? And how can we answer questions about the nature and function of belief? Are the methods employed by cognitive scientists up to the task? In *Belief: A Pragmatic Picture*, I try to answer these questions and connect my answers to the origins of pragmatist philosophical thought. The bridge between the two is constructed with a theory of belief defended by Mill's protege, Alexander Bain, a theory C.S. Peirce would go on to describe as "the axiom of pragmatism." I would like to thank John Capps and the William James Society for organizing this discussion of *Belief* and to thank Capps, Miriam McCormick, and Henry Jackman for providing me with a great deal of incisive critical commentary on the work.

I will begin my response where Capps begins his critique: the fascinating example of Sviatoslav Richter, an accomplished concert pianist, who insisted in a letter to his aunt that he couldn't perform on stage without the plastic lobster he took on tour with him. How ought we to diagnose Richter's frame of mind? Did he really believe he needed the lobster?

As a preliminary, we might ask whether Richter's belief was true. Did Richter really need the lobster to perform? I think the answer is "no," because the truth of Richter's belief that he needed the lobster around was "screened off" by his merely having that belief. In other words, the presence of the lobster itself didn't aid Richter's performance insofar as Richter would have played just as well if someone had tricked him into falsely believing the lobster was with him.

The question, then, is whether Richter really needed *to believe* he had the plastic lobster nearby to perform up to his standards. And I don't see anything absurd in allowing that he did need to employ this belief as a crutch. Of course, Richter might have wondered from time to time whether he might be able to pull off a great show without the lobster in attendance, despite the anxiety he would initially feel knowing he was playing without the thing. But he

would have recognized the potential costs of conducting the experiment with a house packed with fans waiting to witness a confident performance. If the costs of having the lobster nearby were minimal, there would have been no sufficiently weighty reason of self-interest or prudence to induce Richter to test whether he needed to believe his lobster was on hand, and so no pressing need to test that belief itself.

Now, those epistemologists who work on the ethics of belief might agree that there was no "practical" or "pragmatic" reason for Richter to experiment. What they would want to ask Richter (so described) is whether there mightn't have been a sufficiently weighty "epistemic" reason for Richter to have subjected his belief to the test of experience. This seems, for instance, to be one of McCormick's central questions: Do we always have reason to regulate our beliefs by the evidence, even when prudential concerns trump or outweigh these reasons?[1]

I join the Jamesian pragmatists, helpfully described by Jackman, who think that we do not always have these epistemic reasons. And I agree with James that "overbeliefs" are often fine and ought not to be subjected to blanket criticism. (So, I side with the Jamesians as against the Peirceans in the normative squabbles Jackman identifies.) First, I agree with James that epistemic obligations are not definable or knowable *a priori*. We must build up from examples any general guides we might endorse. This is as true of evidentialist principles as it is of any other general norms. More controversially, I agree with James that all norms are social and can only be fruitfully analyzed with reference to interactions between people (or nonhuman social animals) and the expectations that structure their interactions. I think this is as true of epistemic principles, reasons, and obligations as it is of moral principles, reasons, and obligations. As James recognizes, we can make sense of duties to self, but the relationship between a person and her future self is a kind of limiting case of the relationships between people that institute obligations and other normative phenomena in the first instance.[2]

Now, if we bring this Jamesian understanding of epistemic reasons and obligations to our analysis of the cases on hand, we must

ask *who* Richter is supposed to be letting down in believing he needs his plastic lobster to play his instrument for the crowd. And it is surely relevant to our answer to this question that Richter is not a scientist, nor a historian, nor a journalist. Richter does not purport to be someone who has adopted the pursuit and communication of truth (however defined) as a guiding principle in his professional endeavors. And though Richter may consume and communicate science, history, and journalism throughout the day, his belief in the talismanic effects of his lobster is not part of this engagement. Richter's private thoughts about his lobster are not part of any realm of discourse in which respect for the truth (as defined in that discourse) is justly enforced as a regulative norm. At any rate, that's how I will understand the case. For if Richter were instead pushing possession of plastic lobsters on his piano students and insisting that the music theory department at his university incorporate his theory of lobster possession into their curricula, the example would be importantly different from a normative point of view. As Jackman rightly notes, in my view there is more to life than science. In many of the discourses operative outside of science, history, and journalism, respect for the truth (however defined by those engaged in that discourse) is nonessential.

It must be admitted that successful communication typically requires a minimum of consistency. (I say "typically" because there are poetic effects that effectively communicate emotions and ideas through contradictions.) But one can avoid outright contradiction in literal speech without imposing evidentialist norms or regarding oneself as beholden to such norms. And I see nothing wrong or objectionable with these modes of life and their a-alethic discursive components. Those Cliffordians who wag their fingers at Richter from the bleachers are, I think, justly dismissed as "epistemic scolds." Though I won't pursue the allegation here, there are rabid atheists on the scene today (e.g. Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins) who may fall prey to this criticism.

Capps wonders whether there might be a pragmatic conception of truth that does not come apart from belief in the way I have envisioned here. Of course, if "truth" is defined as correspondence

to reality (as reality is "in itself" apart from us), belief does not inevitably aim at the truth. For example, when I come to believe that the moon looks pretty tonight, I am not even *trying* to characterize the moon as it is independently of its effects on me. Still, I think it would be an overreaction to say that belief *never* aims at truth as correspondence. Those scientists interested in accurately characterizing the Earth as it was before the evolution of life may aim at truth in this sense. It is precisely because of this aim that it will bother scientists if they discover that aspects of their theories of the presentient universe are colored or impacted in substantial ways by the use of a scheme of categorization that can only make sense to enculturated humans. (No sense can be made of the claim that the solar system coalesced on a day in January.) I agree with Rorty on this. "Truth" can be defined as correspondence for certain purposes, but we must define the concept differently to structure our debates about human history, psychology, morality, and aesthetics.[3]

But what if we follow Capps's suggestion and define "truth" in pragmatic terms as successful, good, or adaptive belief, thought, and language? Might we therein secure some necessary connection between belief and respect for truth? I am suspicious of this move too, and for several reasons. First, while there is definitely something true about James's characterization of truth in terms of adaptiveness, it cannot be straightforwardly applied to individual beliefs framed within a discourse without absurdity. For example, Frank's belief that he's the prettiest boy in town may be adaptive because he won't find a mate without the confidence this belief imbues. But that doesn't mean Frank's belief is true. And this is so even if we define "truth" about prettiness in an anti-realist way so that "X is pretty" is used to state a truth in the discourse in which Frank participates so long as X strikes a majority of those engaged in this discourse (or a representative observer or [supply your favorite anti-realist account here]) as pretty.

To summarize: if we define "truth" in terms of correspondence to mind-independent reality, it is neither true that Frank is pretty nor true that he is ugly. We know in advance that "pretty" is not a concept we can apply to mind-independent reality in a meaningful

way. But even if we define "truth" for aesthetic judgments in the way Frank and his interlocutors define it, Frank's belief is not true. And yet, for all that, Frank's belief that he is the fairest of them all remains adaptive. The same is true of Richter's belief that he needs his lobster to play well. That belief is not just false in the sense that if fails to accurately represent the world as it is, independently of us. It is also false insofar as Richter will play just as well when he falsely believes he has his lobster with him. If the lobster is not there and Richter plays beautifully because he falsely believes the lobster is there, we must conclude that Richter's belief that he needs the lobster to play well is a false belief. Try as I might, I cannot redefine "truth" to avoid this conclusion.

I have a similar reaction to the neo-Kantian attempts of Misak and Talisse and other contemporary pragmatists who offer transcendental grounds for defining belief in terms of acceptance as truth and insist that we must conceptualize a mental state as something other than belief when we learn it is not responsive to evidence or argument.[4] Perhaps Kant was right that assertion entails some respect for truth insofar as a linguistic community is bound together by their use of a symbol system and its constitutive rules, where respect for truth is inevitably required by those rules. If you're going to assert something in the language that unites such a community, you are in some sense bound by the rules of their language game, in the same sense in which you are bound by the rules of chess if you're going to play that game. But if I am right in arguing that animals who cannot assert things have beliefs in the very same sense in which humans do, belief is not like assertion in this respect. It is not a move in a psycho-social game. We must reject what McCormick describes as "normativism" (following Kate Nolfi). "Belief" is not best defined in terms of norms. As I plead in the book, "Don't tell me what something is by telling me what it ought to be."[5] (I should have noted, however, that the analysis of games is an important exception to this appeal.) As I argue in the book, respect for truth and evidence is not "internal" to belief or definitional of it. Instead, the epistemic virtues must be forced upon animals who are disposed by nature to disregard the truth when

doing so suits their interests. Trump is an exaggerated example of just such an animal.

Of course, I am not suggesting that James was ignorant of these elementary reflections. Instead, I think that when James defines "truth" in terms of successful or adaptive action, he is abstracting from individual cases to describe the background assumptions that structure the belief-forming processes of the particular individuals engaged in a form of life made possible by those background assumptions. In other words, I think James has in mind the truth of what Wittgenstein would go on to call "hinge propositions."[6] (These include the "presuppositions" or "regulative assumptions" of uniformity in nature, etc. on which Peirce focused, as Jackman describes them.) James's idea, I take it, is that the principles we take for granted (e.g. *modus ponens*, pain is bad, red is a color) cannot be vindicated without recourse to pragmatic considerations.[7] If you reject one of these principles, you must propose a real, psychologically accessible alternative and explain why we would be better served by adopting it. Truth *within* a discourse structured by these principles cannot be defined in terms of adaptiveness on pain of absurdity. (Frank just isn't pretty; Richter just doesn't need the lobster.) But the truth *of* such a discourse as a whole must be defined in terms of utility on pain of transcendental pretension. In particular, truth as correspondence cannot be meaningfully applied to modus ponens. This is a point Carnap took from Schlick, who took it from Wittgenstein, who took it from James. And it is a point I explicitly endorse in the book while attempting to trace its origins to Bain's influential account of belief. Jackman points out that Peirce suggested we can just assume hinge principles without believing them once we realize that we cannot ground these principles in evidence or argument. But this thought betrays what Peirce acknowledged as the very axiom of pragmatism: Bain's account of belief. As Jackman says, "If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck" even if it lacks the "gold star" awarded for evidential or argumentative support.[8]

At any rate, though I agree with Capps that "truth" has pragmatic meanings, especially in philosophical discourse about the

foundations of thought, I am not convinced that we should join Capps in supplying "truth" with an exclusively pragmatic interpretation. Moreover, though Capps does an excellent job of describing the central theses of *Belief* (and I am indebted to him for this), I would like to close by clarifying the position I defend in the book in reference to the argument he attributes to me in his comments.

First, I do indeed argue in *Belief* that believing something does not always involve treating or regarding a representation as true. Humans consider claims and endorse assertions, and belief often results from these activities. But the expectations and memories of nonhuman animals are also beliefs, and these beliefs are *themselves* representations of the future or the past rather than *attitudes toward* representations of one sort or another.

I also argue, as a distinct matter, that belief is not essentially propositional. Animal belief is not essentially sentential because the other animals can neither construct nor evaluate the sentences people construct; and yet the other animals have beliefs. So, it's at best misleading to describe, for example, a bee's mental map as a "propositional attitude." It confuses the scientists who are trying their best to describe how bees communicate the location of a resource to one another, as well as similar feats of animal cognition. I have read and conversed with animal ethologists who think they can't use "belief" to reference an action-guiding structure that isn't propositional because "philosophers" have supposedly converged on the view that beliefs are propositional attitudes. We can and should fix this.

But I don't think the propositional should be contrasted with the dispositional as Capps seems to do.[9] For example, Fodor argues that beliefs are propositional insofar as they are sentential tokens in a language of thought that "express" propositions. But Fodor thinks that these tokens acquire their status as beliefs by playing a certain functional role, where functional roles can be characterized in terms of characteristic causes and imbued *dispositions*. So, Fodor incorporates both propositional representations and dispositions into his analysis of belief. Of course, I join the pragmatists in arguing

that beliefs are dispositions of a different sort than those countenanced by Fodor insofar as Fodor fails to incorporate attention and control into his analyses, and I argue, separately, that beliefs are not essentially propositional, though some beliefs are; i.e. the discursive beliefs we express in sincere assertion in those favorable circumstances in which we are poised to act on what we assert.

I also join Jackman in thinking beliefs are often short-lived. Suppose I hear my grandmother's voice in the hall and "light up" at the prospect of seeing her, only to realize moments later that she has been dead for some time. It seems to me that my momentary expectation of seeing her in the hall is a belief that she is out there, but its tenuousness is compatible with its constituting a dispositional complex and therein satisfying the pragmatic definition of belief I defend in *Belief*. For a brief interval, I was disposed to use the information that my grandma was in the hall to guide my actions, by saying "Hi, grandma," jumping up to get the door for her, and so on. We must not conflate the defining *modal* profile of a belief with its inessential *temporal* properties.

I would also like to contrast my methodology with the one Capps endorses in his essay when he states, "A good pragmatic elucidation requires balancing the variety of ways concepts are actually used with the need to identify the core meaning that makes the concept philosophically interesting." This is not quite the role I assign to definitions in the construction of a philosophy or worldview. First, I think "philosophical interest" is a maximally relative concept and it only has a core meaning when used within a homogenous philosophical community. We have more pressing, practical, or pragmatic needs for definitions than this. As McCormick notes, in the book I focus on our need to define "belief" for the purposes of legal punishment because this is perhaps the most serious context for those caught up in the machine. And "belief" is a crucial legal concept because the "intention in action" of the accused can be defined as that agent's belief as to what she was doing when she was doing whatever she's been accused of doing. A judge or jury's

understanding of "belief" in these contexts really matters to the person whose fate may depend on the contours of that definition.[10]

But the need to define "belief" for the purposes of our social interactions outside the courtroom is equally pressing. The assignment of racially prejudicial belief that I discuss in the book is just a particularly fraught example of a more general phenomenon. As I argue in *Belief*, a person's mental health depends on her self-image, which in turn depends on her beliefs about herself and her beliefs about what other people believe about her. We need to keep this in mind when we analyze candidate definitions of "belief" and the metaphysical theories or pictures we can develop through the explication of these varying definitions. I think our definitions ought to cohere with the relevant sciences (i.e. the cognitive sciences) because I embrace the unity of knowledge as a working hypothesis. But I argue in the book that several different definitions can be made to cohere with results in these sciences, even when the disputing parties bring the same theoretical virtues to their evaluation of the field. It's at this stage that we ought to consider the overall consequences of adopting one or another of the definitions in play.

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NOTES

[1] McCormick also asks whether one can take oneself to believe for practical reasons. My answer is "yes." She asks whether it can be "good or proper or rational" to believe for practical reasons. My answer is "yes." She asks whether an optimistic belief (which runs contrary to the evidence) can be epistemically irrational. My answer is "yes." She asks whether it might be good in some sense to adopt and retain an epistemically irrational belief. My answer is "yes." Finally, she asks what "delineates" the cases of good epistemic irrationality from wholly bad beliefs. My answer is that it depends on the case, and the needs and interests of those involved. Normative and evaluative principles are not given to us a priori.

[2] See James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life." We can also discuss the norms that govern the relationship between humans and other animals as McCormick presses me to do when asking whether the other animals can be held to the epistemic norms to which historians, scientists, and journalists hold one another. I join the Spinozans in thinking that belief is the default and that we must learn to distrust our senses and memories. Self-control is necessary for doubt and the deliberate regulation of belief it enables. But I agree that some of the other animals are capable of self-control. So, it is possible to criticize a nonhuman animal for epistemic frailty (e.g. gullibility). But it is currently impossible to communicate epistemic expectations to nonhuman animals, so there is no room for the paradigmatic normative judgment that such an animal failed to consider what she knew she ought to have considered (because she was told she ought to have considered it) or failed to reason as she ought to have reasoned (because she was instructed to reason in this way) or, more generally, failed to do what she knew she was supposed to do. This is one of the reasons why the other animals don't conduct anything like science, history, or journalism. These activities are constructed through the communication and enforcement of expectations once communicated.

[3] See Rorty, "Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism."

[4] See Misak and Talisse, "Pragmatist Epistemology."

[5] Zimmerman, *Belief*, 84.

[6] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 341.

[7] The intended class of hinge propositions is uncertain, but it was meant to include more than just our basic inductive principles and the assumptions we must make to accumulate observational evidence and reason from it. In addition to these traditional sources of knowledge, Wittgenstein includes among the "hinges" various less general propositions acquired via enculturation: an adult's knowledge of her own name and the meanings of other words in her native language, a man's assumption that he hasn't been to places he can't remember visiting, and the supposition, common at the time of composition, that no one had yet been to the moon. The list goes on, "We know, with the same certainty with which we believe any mathematical proposition, how the letters A and B are pronounced, what the colour of human blood is called, that other human beings have blood and call it 'blood'" (Wittgenstein, 340).

[8] This is not the only case in which "pragmatists" have abandoned the movement's central axiom. For instance, Misak classifies Davidson as a pragmatist even though Davidson restricted beliefs to humans and therein rejected one of Bain's central insights.

[9] See too Schwitzgebel, "Belief."

[10] McCormick says she finds this discussion "extreme and distracting." But I think it *should* distract us from less pressing academic questions about the scope of distinctively "epistemic" criticisms. We can, of course, discuss both sets of questions if we have the time. But we ought to prioritize discussion of those conceptual decisions that most impact the lives of people and other animals.

Review of *Reconstructing the Personal Library of William James: Markings and Marginalia from the Harvard Library Collection*. By Ermine L. Algaier IV. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020. 298 pp. ISBN 1498552905. US$115.

One of the more thoughtful reflections on libraries and book collecting is Walter Benjamin's essay "Unpacking My Library." Facing the daunting task of removing his extensive collection from its packing crates in order to shelve it, Benjamin observed that

> there is in the life of a collector a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order. . . . For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order?[1]

One imposes order initially by placing the individual volumes on shelves. But how ought one to arrange them? Will it be by subject matter or perhaps alphabetically by author? Shall it be according to chronology of publication date? Might the different languages in which they are written require their own clustering? Whichever system of orderliness we choose, it must permit us practical ease in the quick retrieval of any desired volume that circumstance makes necessary. As it is with libraries, so too it is with experience itself. In "Reflex Action and Theism," William James writes that the world comes to us "in an order so foreign to our subjective interests that we can hardly by an effort of the imagination picture to ourselves

what it is like."[2] A library collection mirrors brute experience itself. It presents us with an initial disorder that we must convert into an orderliness as subjective interest and practical action dictate. In this way, the arrangement of a library collection is the reflection of the one who arranges: of their interests as well as the diverse channels and tributaries of their intellectual curiosity.

James amassed an impressive personal library over the course of his career, and in *Reconstructing the Personal Library of William James: Markings and Marginalia from the Harvard Library Collection,* Ermine Algaier IV has provided the scholarly community with a painstakingly careful inventory of the books that found a lasting place in James's massive third floor study on Irving Street. An initial estimate of close to 10,000 volumes from the early 1920s may be open to dispute, but what is not disputed is the manner in which the titles bear witness to the full range of James's intellectual curiosity. Yet, as is the case with everyone, the horizon of James's reading certainly far exceeded the inventory in his personal library; one does not purchase every book that tempts one's curiosity. And if we are truthful, while some volumes we do possess are worn to the threshold of destruction by repeated study, we do not read and reread with careful attention every book that we purchase.

A moment's reflection suggests certain useful parallels between Algaier's project and elements of James's thought. The decision to add a volume to one's permanent collection represents both a deliberate decision and a statement about its value in relation to other works that one could, but does not acquire. In examining the titles that one chooses to keep close at hand, we can learn much about the collector's temperament and interests. A collection represents something of an organic whole, more or less unified, that the collector selects from the vast universe of printed books available. Such selective activity is guided, as James notes, by one's practical interests: "the exuberant excess of [one's] subjective propensities," as he puts it.[3] Each newly acquired volume enters into a relationship with every other one already cataloged; the inclusion of each transforms both the new addition as well as the established collection as a whole. Each new edition contributes its own

perspective and content to one already established and defined. Thus, a library grows by its edges, as it were. Recall James's vivid assertion that our

> minds thus grow in spots; and like grease-spots, the spots spread. But we let them spread as little as possible: we keep unaltered as much of our old knowledge, as many of our old prejudices and beliefs, as we can. We patch and tinker more than we renew. The novelty soaks in; it stains the ancient mass; but it is also tinged by what absorbs it.[4]

Is this not also the case with a library collection?

Algaier's text falls into two main sections. The first is primarily introductory and contextual. It describes the library as it resided in James's home. Algaier examines various source lists of its contents, along with the history of the fate of the collection after James's death. While some volumes ended up in Harvard's university libraries, other titles were dispersed as gifts or purchased by private individuals. Still others were sold off to local booksellers, and unbelievably, not a few suffered the ultimate indignity of returning to the primal chaos of the trash heap. The picture we get is rather a complicated one and, owing to the vicissitudes of fate, less than exhaustively complete. This only enhances our appreciation for Algaier's careful work. In addition to his overview of the history of James's library, he includes brief, yet useful discussions of the resources used to reconstruct the collection as well as a section on preservation of the collection that remains.

The discussion potentially of greatest interest to the scholar examines James's marginalia and annotations, which include the inscriptions in presentation copies from authors who were among James's close friends. Most interestingly to the scholar, some volumes are heavily annotated while others hardly at all. As Algaier observes, these notations provide "a brief glimpse into another's world and how James interacted with it."[5] They allow the reader to eavesdrop on a conversation between James and the author of the text he has in hand. James's specific annotations aside, Algaier

offers some interesting reflections on the practice and significance of these markings and notes. Margin notes may be terse or expansive, but regardless, they pose miniature riddles to those who seek to reconstruct the connection between James and the author with whom he is engaging. The reader thus confronts two texts: the original content of the book as well as the brief comments that the book elicited in James as he read.

The second bibliographic section, which catalogs the contents of James's library, takes up the bulk of the book. It is divided into sections on books and pamphlets as well as periodicals, some held at Harvard and others elsewhere. The vast variation in title and topic at first appears to be nothing but a symptom of the discontinuity and disorder to which Benjamin alluded. One finds works as diverse as St. Francis of Assisi's devotional writings and Gustave Le Bon's influential study of crowds. There are volumes of biblical criticism as well as works dealing with clinical psychology and neurological disorders. Charcot's early research into issues in psychology finds a place here as well, along with a copy of Freud's revolutionary *Uber den Traum*, the only Freud text identified in James's collection. Sources known to James's readers primarily by name are included as well—Benjamin Blood and Thomas Davidson, for example— providing the researcher with resources to dive more deeply into the James texts where these names appear. James knew that valuable lessons can be learned from unexpected sources, from intellectual giants as well as rural farmers and urban subway workers. So too with books.

The bibliographic material is extensive and will prove invaluable to scholars seeking to survey the center, as well as the margins, of James's thinking. Let me offer some examples. I have spent some time studying James's relationship with the so-called Florentine pragmatists that he met in 1905 while attending a congress in Rome. Giovanni Papini seems to have made the greatest impression on James, leading him to publish a summary account of what he took to be Papini's brand of pragmatism shortly thereafter. But Papini alone does not exhaust the rich variety of pragmatism that James found there; others in Papini's circle would likewise

acknowledge James as a significant influence. Giuseppe Prezzolini who, with Papini, represented the more "Jamesian" variety of Italian pragmatism, claimed to draw heavily from *The Principles of Psychology* and went on to develop a very aggressive reading of "The Will to Believe." Mario Calderoni and Giovanni Vailati represented the more positivistic wing of the group, taking their inspiration from Peirce's original and more restricted application of the pragmatic maxim. They were highly critical of the voluntaristic strain that both Papini and Prezzolini sought to defend. James's library contained Prezzolini's polemically playful *L'arte di persuadere* as well as several of Papini's works, ranging from *Il crepuscolo dei filosofi* to his studies of George Berkeley and Walt Whitman. While James's inventory lists none of Calderoni's works, Vailati is amply represented with several book-length entries dealing with problems of linguistic meaning and conceptual clarity as these might impact both science and wider culture. Most interestingly, there are four issues of Papini's short-lived yet highly influential periodical *Leonardo* cataloged in the periodicals section of Algaier's bibliography. James explicitly refers to this periodical, as well as the Papini titles, with great enthusiasm in his "G. Papini and the Pragmatist Movement in Italy" of 1907. Having this knowledge of James's direct access to such works is useful for expanding upon his influence in Italy in greater detail.

Another example concerns works by George Holmes Howison. Today, his name is somewhat obscure, which belies his significant place within pragmatism and pluralism. He is particularly remembered as the individual who invited James to California in 1898 where "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results" announced pragmatism to the philosophical world. Howison was famous on the West Coast for his teaching as well as for the Philosophical Union he founded and maintained at Berkeley. He and James had been well acquainted for years, and James even expressed regret about having overlooked Howison in favor of Royce as his sabbatical replacement at Harvard in the early 1880s. Several years before James's 1898 visit to California, the Union played host to Josiah Royce's homecoming and subsequent debate with Howison

(and others), later published as *The Concept of God*. Howison constructed his personal idealism on the framework of Kantian thought, and when James closed "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results" with an attack on Kant, he meant it as a criticism of Howison as well. In spite of sharing a deep commitment to pluralism, James and Howison crossed swords over evolution and the a priori. Algaier's bibliography shows that James owned several of Howison's books on topics such as the philosophy of religion; commentaries on Kant, Hegel, and Royce; and multiple copies of *The Limits of Evolution*, a collection of essays, each of which develops Howison's criticism of James. We learn that James clearly followed Howison closely; at least close enough to amass these volumes, and their inclusion in his personal collection is useful background material for understanding their relationship as well as its difficult conclusion when, in a sharp fit of pique, Howison broke off their friendship, angered at receiving no mention at all from James in the pages of *A Pluralistic Universe.*

   In closing, let us recall Emerson's own appraisal of the contents of libraries. "Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst," so he famously tells us in "The American Scholar."[6] They serve the reader poorly if they harden into something akin to authoritative gospel but serve that reader well when they keep to their genuine office, that is, when they simply aim to inspire. The great mischief to which books and libraries are susceptible lies in subordinating the act of creation and thought to the record calcified in print. One "had better never see a book," he writes, "than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit. . . . The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul."[7] If anything, Ermine Algaier's book demonstrates just what an active and creative soul James possessed. As evidenced by the scope of the titles in his library, as well as by his annotations and margin notes, James allowed books to quicken his own thinking, all the while managing to resist their inexorable gravitational pull. Algaier writes that a mere hour's perusal, as much as anything, will transport the reader into "the genuine pluralism of James's world."[8] Scholars will find more than a few hours of rich material here that should quicken their

own research and thinking. *Reconstructing the Personal Library of William James* will find a vital and well-deserved place in the library of anyone engaging the thought of William James as well as the intellectual culture which helped to nourish his actively creative soul.

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NOTES
[1] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 60.
[2] James, *The Will to Believe*, 104.
[3] James, 104.
[4] James, *Pragmatism*, 168.
[5] Algaier, *Personal Library of William James*, 72.
[6] Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, 57.
[7] Emerson, 57.
[8] Algaier, 4.

Review of *Vernunft und Temperament: Eine Philosophie der Philosophie*. By Logi Gunnarsson. Leiden & Paderborn: Brill/Mentis, 2020. 447 pp. ISBN 978-3-95743-181-3. US$57.

As philosophy is, to a large extent, discussion with real or imagined conversation partners, philosophers have since Plato written fictional dialogues whose characters represent the positions examined. Logi Gunnarsson's *Vernuft und Temperament* joins this perennial tradition by interpreting and further developing William James's philosophy in the form of an exchange between two imagined figures, Bill Headstrong and Wilhelm Kornblum. These "soulmates," an American and a German, set out to write a joint book on James, but they gradually run into disagreements, and eventually Kornblum leaves the project. The chapters they produce are, however, "published" by Headstrong, along with their correspondence illuminating the progress of their project and its abrupt ending.

Gunnarsson's volume acknowledges a central feature of Jamesian *pluralism*: there are many "voices" in philosophical investigation. The book accounts for this insight through its unconventional form, but the same result could have been achieved in an ordinary monograph by arguing that James's views entail a genuinely polyphonic conception of philosophy. In any case, a dialogue like this is, presumably, a monologue in disguise.[1] Kornblum and Headstrong are figments of Gunnarsson's philosophical mind—and perhaps, by extension, James's. It is a fresh but somewhat strange decision to put two fictional

philosophers into a dialogue about a *real* historical philosopher; in their book chapters, they also cite a number of other sources, historical and recent, so the reader is invited to imagine that they live in the real world of contemporary academia.

This artificiality of the arrangement notwithstanding, the arguments developed are vitally important. The main idea Headstrong and Kornblum agree about is the Jamesian contention that we must philosophize as genuine human beings. Philosophical theories are individual persons' attempts to live on in the world. We encounter "the whole human being" in a philosophical work. "True philosophy" does not (merely) consist of true theories but primarily of a correct philosophical way of living. For example, the question concerning free will (vs. determinism), or the meta-level one concerning compatibilism and incompatibilism, cannot be resolved purely theoretically but must be tested in one's life, with emotions playing a crucial role in our evaluation of the potential solutions.

For a Jamesian-inspired philosopher, it is relatively easy to agree with these views defended by Gunnarsson via his fictional characters. What is more problematic is the author's decision to restrict the discussion to the early James and to avoid his later *pragmatism* (which, appropriately interpreted and developed, could render the basic position of the book even more plausible). The main sources are the essays collected in *The Will to Believe*, many of which were first published in the 1870–80s.

Gunnarsson's characters speak about the "truth" of philosophical views throughout the volume. Philosophical theories or propositions [*Sätze*] are said to be true [*wahr*] or false; however, a "good philosopher" must be a "true human being" [*ein wahrer Mensch*],[2] and philosophical "truths" may thus be (partly) practical and emotional.[3] These expressions suggest a play with the word *wahr*, which could in some contexts be translated as "genuine." The German word thus behaves rather similarly to its English equivalent. What troubles me is the choice to resolutely avoid interpreting this in the sense of the "pragmatist conception of truth." The truth the Jamesian "true human being" is seeking when pursuing philosophical truth (and philosophical life) is *not*, according to

Gunnarsson, truth in the pragmatist sense—though something like this was, presumably, James's mature position.

The notion of *temperament* figuring in Gunnarsson's title would also suggest taking seriously what James says about "philosophical temperaments" in *Pragmatism*, which is beyond the scope of the investigation. *Pragmatism* is a rich source of insights into what it is to be a "true human being"—and what it thus means to pursue philosophical truths in the full-blown pragmatist sense. Many of the views criticized by the later James (e.g., materialism, determinism, Hegelian idealism, theodicies explaining evil away) are arguably *pragmatically false* because they cannot in the end be held by a "true" human being.[4]

Nevertheless, what Gunnarsson says about the early James is certainly worth saying, and it should be admitted that pragmatism is only one of the potential outcomes of James's early thought.[5] As philosophy is contingently embedded in human life, we should avoid reading classics like James teleologically, assuming that their early views inevitably lead to their "mature" views. At the meta-level, however, I think James's position changed little: he seems to have maintained from early on that a "true human being" is presented with philosophical questions that need to be answered through that person's life, and that the point of philosophical systems is to answer such questions.[6] Philosophy thus emerges as something like a vocation for a person living "truly." There is also a kind of melancholy—comparable to the condition of the sick soul in James's *Varieties*—almost inevitably attached to philosophical life, and deep philosophical truths can be achieved only through such a melancholy.[7]

When justifying their restriction to the young James, the author(s) maintain that the claim that the answers to philosophical questions depend on emotional grounds is independent of the pragmatist theory of truth.[8] This may be true (!), but addressing the topic of this book in the context of the later James would in my view have made the overall case more plausible. Now the exact sense in which the concept of truth is used remains less than fully developed and slightly obscure. Perhaps Gunnarsson assumes the

correspondence theory of truth or a pre-philosophical "ordinary" notion of truth?

Moreover, the idea that the grounds determining the correctness or incorrectness of philosophical theories are practical and emotional rather than purely theoretical ("*nicht rein theoretisch, sondern praktisch bzw. emotional oder empfindungsbezogen*"[9]) sounds like a formulation of pragmatism, although the very distinction between the theoretical and the practical could be questioned by the Jamesian pragmatist.

When it is suggested that, according to James, life can be worth living only if "pluralistic moralism" is "true"—i.e., there really is good and evil in the world—this could, again, be plausibly understood in the sense of pragmatist truth.[10] Similarly, the claim that optimism is made true by, or depends on, our subjective reactions would be natural to cash out in explicitly pragmatist terms.[11] Alternatively, this could mean that we merely (epistemologically) employ our emotions to test the truth of theories like optimism or materialism, which are true or false independently of emotions, but this would be a relatively thin account of the "true human being."[12] At any rate, both "early-Jamesians" and "late-Jamesians" can agree on the need to widen the scope of philosophical reason in truth-seeking from the allegedly merely theoretical area to a practical area taking individual temperament and emotions seriously. For example, the question concerning the truth of materialism cannot be distinguished from the question concerning our ability to live without objective norms;[13] our metaphysical views thus depend on our ethical orientation.

I believe it is problematic to isolate James's later pragmatism from the early writings this book focuses on for at least two reasons. First, as suggested, the use of "true" and "truth" in the relevant contexts could be claimed to presuppose a pragmatist conception of truth—or to function as an early articulation of that conception—though this is explicitly denied. At least a pragmatist interpretation makes better sense of those contexts than, say, a standard realistic one. Secondly, more historically, James was, obviously, already in the 1870s deeply influenced by Peirce and the Metaphysical Club,

within which pragmatism was emerging, while the word was first used in print (by James) only in 1898.[14] Therefore, the decision to cut out pragmatism seems to me as artificial as the fictional dialogue form of the book.

This said, Gunnarsson's account of the young James—philosophical and historical—is outstanding. It is particularly important to understand James's spiritual crisis (ca. 1870) as a crisis concerning our philosophical search for the truth. It is the pursuit of truth concerning freedom (vs. determinism) and, hence, the very possibility of morality that leads us to the philosophical, and melancholic, questions bringing James to his collapse, and far from being able to resolve such issues by means of the kind of purely theoretical argumentation one encounters in the hundreds of volumes published on the problem of the free will, the Jamesian needs to face this crisis as an entire human being. In a sense, this crisis could be seen as leading the Jamesian thinker to *critical* philosophy in a quasi-Kantian sense (though this is not suggested by either Gunnarsson or James), because the basic worry concerns the inability of our philosophical reason to solve the problems our lives set us.[15] A "Kantian" aspect of James could also be naturally emphasized when it comes to analyzing James's views on the conditions for the possibility [*Ermöglichungsbedingungen*] of moral integrity and meaningful life.[16]

Gunnarsson's chapter 4 is a detailed biographical account of James's years of crisis, 1868–1873,[17] while chapter 5 (Headstrong's version)[18] provides a painstakingly detailed interpretation of James's argument for incompatibilism culminating in a 48-step reconstruction of this argument, illustrating the way in which James's "philosophy of philosophy" employs emotional reactions in the justification of philosophical theories.[19] In this context, in particular, Gunnarsson (i.e., Headstrong) argues that philosophical theories are objectively true or false—in a non-pragmatist sense—and the purpose of testing them in practical life is to find out whether they are true or false; again, no pragmatist (or any other) theory of truth is ascribed to James.[20] Emotions and subjective reactions pertain primarily to the *grounds* [*Gründe*] of philosophical truths.

Subjective emotions do not simply make such truths true, especially not in any straightforward causal sense. There is, according to James, a kind of "congruence" between our subjective contribution and the way the world is, but this does not compromise the objectivity of philosophical truth.[21]

The discussion, as admirably clear and argumentative as it is, seems to oscillate, perhaps deliberately, between a metaphysical dependence of truth on subjectivity ("life-reactions") and an epistemic dependence of our reasons for believing truths on subjectivity. The great value of a fully developed pragmatist account of truth is to run these together. This is particularly important, I think, in the "will to believe" type of cases concerning, say, freedom—in short, cases that may lead us to crises of life coloring our entire pursuit of truth. Thus, James's later pragmatic pluralism is arguably a development of the early position, rather than something to be rejected in order to maintain the objectivity of philosophical truth.[22]

In chapter 6, the more academically minded of the characters, Headstrong, moves on to formulate his (i.e., presumably, Gunnarsson's) own theory of how philosophical truths involve "the whole human being." While his previous chapter was concerned with interpreting James, Headstrong now seeks to show that a carefully articulated version of the Jamesian position is actually correct (for a summary of the metaphilosophical theses defended).[23] Here the notion of truth is brought onto a metaphilosophical level: "*Wir wollen vor allem die Wahrheit in James's These ausarbeiten, dass der ganze Mensch über die Wahrheit philosophischer Theorien entscheidet. Ist diese These richtig?*."[24] Does it follow that the concept of truth can equally well be applied at the metaphilosophical level to the theses and theories put forward in this book? Or is the choice of the word *richtig* here a signal of some uncertainty regarding this point?[25] Again, a pragmatist conception of truth would offer a smooth way of handling the matter. However, both Gunnarssonian characters, also Kornblum, agree that the pragmatist theory of truth is *false*[26]—whatever *this* exactly means for them.

Gunnarsson's project is highly ambitious and bold in its thoroughgoing *reflexivity*: whatever it means to speak about truth in philosophy, we have to extend this discussion to the metaphilosophical truths we pursue in seeking the right attitude to philosophizing in our lives. In this sense, the book is really about what it is to be a "true human being." This also means that metaethical theses must be investigated with reference to ("first-order") ethical views and emotions.[27] While Gunnarsson does not develop his ideas in these terms, it could be suggested that he ascribes to the early James a version of "holistic pragmatism": our theoretical and practical, including ethical, beliefs are "in the same boat" and form a "seamless web" tested as a totality in the course of our lives, and feelings of ethical obligation may legitimately lead to revisions of factual beliefs.[28]

The fictional characters in a sense (holistically) represent two sides of James, and perhaps of Gunnarsson's intended reader as well: the more academic and scholarly (Headstrong) and the more popular and life-oriented (Kornblum). The tension between these two philosophical selves leads to a break between the fictional authors: Kornblum decides to leave academic philosophy and change his life; Headstrong, on the contrary, insists on discussing James's work within the context of academic philosophy, distinguishing clearly between interpreting James and arguing for one's own position (while doing both). Kornblum in the end gives up not only the project but also his academic life in order to test his philosophical ideas in a true Jamesian spirit by "living." This could have been reconsidered. Why give the impression that academic life is not "real"? The Jamesian philosopher could argue that we need more, and better, such life, not the rejection of academic life *à la* Kornblum. The very distinction between scholarly and "real" life is unpragmatic and in my view un-Jamesian. It is also a cliché unnecessary to repeat in an extremely sophisticated and generally very well-argued philosophical work.

Gunnarsson's unusual volume is an impressive achievement and to be warmly recommended to scholars seriously interested in James, metaphysics, ethics, philosophy of life, and metaphilosophy.

It is well written, accessible (but not popular), carefully argued and learned, though somewhat puzzling in its setup and in portraying only an early time-slice of the complex character of James.

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Gunnarsson, Logi. *Vernunft und Temperament: Eine Philosophie der Philosophie*. Leiden & Paderborn: Brill/Mentis, 2020.
Pihlström, Sami. *Pragmatic Realism, Religious Truth, and Antitheodicy: On Viewing the World by Acknowledging the Other*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2020.
White, Morton. *A Philosophy of Culture: The Scope of Holistic Pragmatism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

NOTES
[1] Eino Kaila, a Finnish philosopher also inspired by James, pointed out in the introduction to *his* dialogical work, *Syvähenkinen elämä* ([Deep-Mental Life], 1943), that the "dialogues" philosophers have constructed since Plato are actually, invariably, monologues.
[2] Gunnarsson, *Vernunft und Temperament*, 19; see also, e.g., 50, 79, 147, 218–19.
[3] Gunnarsson, 77.
[4] I have tried to suggest in my own work on James that even loose references to truth in such contexts should be interpreted with reference to James's pragmatist account of truth. See Sami Pihlström, *Pragmatic Realism, Religious Truth.*
[5] Gunnarsson, 39.
[6] Gunnarsson, 25–26.
[7] Gunnarsson, 33–34, 79–80, 83.
[8] Gunnarsson, 47.

[9] Gunnarsson, 48.

[10] Gunnarsson, 127–8.

[11] Gunnarsson, 152.

[12] Cf. Gunnarsson, 154.

[13] Gunnarsson, 168.

[14] See, however, Gunnarsson, 167, 187–9.

[15] See Gunnarsson, 71.

[16] Gunnarsson, 313.

[17] More precisely, the authors distinguish three periods in the development of the early James: the crisis phase (from the late 1860s to 1878), the creative phase (1878–1884, during which most of the papers addressing these issues were first written and published), and the reconsideration phase (*Nacharbeitungsphase*, 1884–1896, when further contributions developing the same ideas, including most famously "The Will to Believe," were written).

[18] Due to the disagreement between the two fictional authors, the book contains two chapters 5, one by each. Kornblum's chapter 5 is a fictional philosophical diary of James—a layer of fiction within the fiction—while the one by Headstrong offers a conventional scholarly reading of James.

[19] Gunnarsson, 327–31.

[20] Gunnarsson, 256–62.

[21] See, for example, Gunnarsson, 279.

[22] Cf. Gunnarsson, 289–90.

[23] See Gunnarsson, 374–75.

[24] Gunnarsson, 337.

[25] In chapter 6, both truth and rightness are ascribed to philosophical theories (Gunnarsson, 343–44).

[26] Gunnarsson, 408.

[27] Gunnarsson, 373.

[28] This holistic pragmatism is developed by Morton White, for example, in his *A Philosophy of Culture*.

RELATED SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS ON JAMES
November 2019 – September 2020

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.

Bella, Michela. "Novelty and Causality in William James's Pluralistic Universe." *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* **11, no. 2 (2019): 1-25.**
https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.1668

The issue of the emergence of genuinely new events in a paradigm of natural continuity has been analyzed in different fields by Pragmatists authors like Peirce, Dewey, and Mead. Another way to consider the problematic relationship between novelty and continuity is by considering William James's understanding of causal connections. This article addresses the concept of causality that James repeatedly addressed and deeply rethought throughout his career. I believe that the concept of causality provides an excellent platform from which to view the various aspects that have made James's epistemological and metaphysical thinking so influential in the history of theories of emergence, and which is experiencing currently a major revival.

Boxill, Bernard R. "W.E.B. DuBois and William James on Double Consciousness." *Journal of Social Philosophy* **(Spring 2020): 1-17.**
https://doi.org/10.1111/josp.12329

[No abstract available]

Capps, John. "William James and the Will to Alieve." *Contemporary Pragmatism* **17, no. 1 (2020): 1-20.**
https://doi.org/10.1163/18758185-01701002

William James' "The Will to Believe" (1896/1979) continues to attract scholarly attention. This might seem surprising since James' central claim – that one may justifiably believe *p* despite having inconclusive evidence for *p* – seems both very clear and also very wrong. I argue

that many of the interpretive and substantive challenges of this essay can be overcome by framing James' thesis in terms of what Tamar Gendler defines as "alief." I consider two readings of James' position (one charitable, the other super-charitable) and conclude that the "will to believe" rests on a misnomer. "The Will to Alieve" is more accurate – though the "Right to Alieve" is even better still.

Chengbing, Wang. "Possible Approaches to the Comparative Study of William James and Traditional Chinese Philosophy." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* **(2020): 1-3.** **https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1750088**

[No abstract available]

Colella, E. Paul. "'I suppose I ought to say something about the war': William James, Pragmatism and the War with Spain, 1898." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* **56, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 81-104.** **https://doi.org/10.2979/trancharpeirsoc.56.1.05**

Students of William James typically regard "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results" as the place where he introduces pragmatism to the intellectual world as a uniquely American approach to philosophy. There, James describes the lineage of pragmatism with its origins in the work of Peirce and provides his own variant on the original. James next proceeds to illustrate the method by applying it to traditional metaphysical problems. The current paper explores an additional reading of James's address, one that places it within the context of the contemporary national debate surrounding the 1898 War with Spain and its emergent imperialist aftermath. This paper examines how the philosophical advantages that James claims for the pragmatic method when directed to the technical problems of philosophy can be read as

addressing issues surrounding that war and the public debate that it aroused. In "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results" pragmatism emerges not only as a point of view for professional philosophers in their struggle with perennial technical problems of metaphysics, but also as a powerful tool for addressing the timely matters of national policy surrounding America's imperialist adventure within the wider, non-technical public sphere of practical life.

Dastmard, Marziyeh and Abbas Izadpanah. "The Relationship of Religion and Spirituality in the School of Thought of William James." *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 6, no. 6 (2020): 730-38. https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v6i6.1196

Psychology of religion, an interdisciplinary field between psychology and religion, is a new knowledge that describes psychological experiences, attitudes and behaviors. This knowledge began in the late nineteenth century and was consolidated in three British, American, German and French traditions. The American tradition of experientialism, using specimens and case studies and statistical descriptions, is the intellectual philosopher and functional psychologist and nominee pragmatist William James, who empirically examines the psychological analysis of religious affairs. He who believes in the ultimate assessment of thought or experience by examining the result and the rate of profitability in life relies on two criteria of compatibility with the correct assumptions and beliefs as well as intuition and introverting as the main and most reliable research tool. James seeks to study religion over the life of man, his actions and experiences, and for this purpose uses the term religious experience. William James also believes that emotions are the most stable and fundamental elements, and religion is essentially a matter

of feeling. In his view, religious experience is an experience that the subject understands religiously. In this sense, the religion of feelings, actions, and experiences of individuals in their loneliness is against whatever they consider sacred. In order to understand more about James's views on religion, this article seeks to study the relationship between religion and psychology. William James is an intellectual think tank.

de Freitas Araujo, Saulo. "Truth, Half-Truth, and Post-Truth: Lessons from William James." *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* **(2020): 1-13.**
https://doi.org/10.1080/10720537.2020.1727390

According to many authors, we live in a post-truth era, to the extent that truth has become subordinated to politics. This has implications not only to political debates, but also to science, technology, and common-sense thinking. In this paper, I claim that William James's conception of truth may shed new light on the contemporary post-truth debate. First, I will present the essential elements of James's initial position. Then, I will discuss some of his amendments to clarify and improve his theory to avoid misunderstandings. Finally, I will address his potential contributions to the contemporary post-truth debate, and consider whether there are special implications for psychology.

Dunham, Jeremy. "On the Experience of Activity: William James's Late Metaphysics and the Influence of Nineteenth-Century French Spiritualism." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* **58, no. 2 (April 2020): 267-91.**
https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2020.0039

Is there a particular experience-type associated with the exercise of agency? This question was subject to lively philosophical debate in nineteenth-century France.

William James paid close attention to these debates, and for most of his academic life argued that the answer was "no." However, in this article, I show that a few years before the end of his life, under the influence of the French spiritualist tradition, he changed his mind. I argue that this change led to a global shift in his philosophical thinking. One major consequence of this is that he modified his philosophy so that it allowed a greater role for "objective" reality, and was consequently at less risk of the charge of "solipsism" directed at him by his critics. After this shift, James's philosophy could stand on much firmer ground.

Goldman, Loren. "William James, Energy, and the Pluralist Ethic of Receptivity." ***Theory & Event*** **23, no. 3 (July 2020): 706-33.**
https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/760418.

[No abstract available]

Guilmette, Lauren. "Teresa Brennan, William James, and the Energetic Demands of Ethics." ***The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*** **33, no. 4 (2020): 590-609.**
https://doi.org/10.5325/jspecphil.33.4.0590

This article engages the late feminist philosopher Teresa Brennan in conversation with William James on "energetics" and "living attention." Brennan should be prominent in what has been called the "affective turn"; yet, due to her untimely death, she remains peripheral. Against this trend, Shannon Sullivan (2015) recently appealed to Brennan to supplement James on emotion, recalibrating his sense of energetic relationality at times obscured by Victorian individualistic tropes. I extend Sullivan's claim to consider how Brennan builds upon a Jamesian discourse of "energy" to describe the concrete possibilities of – and structural obstacles to – solidarity, with concern for the

circulation of affects that energize some and drain others. While Brennan rarely references James, her papers in Brown's Feminist Theory Archive show that she read him actively in her last years, planning to write her next book on "consciousness." It is less surprising, then, that Brennan's theories would resonate with Jamesian ideas, and I develop this resonance in Brennan's published work.

Hackett, J. Edward. "Engaging in an Accurate Assessment of Pluralism in William James." *Contemporary Pragmatism* **17, no. 1 (2020): 85-99.**
https://doi.org/10.1163/18758185-01701006

In this essay, I will respond to the several charges laid at my feet by Robert Talisse and Scott Aikin engaged in their response entitled "Pragmatism and 'Existential' Pluralism: A Response to Hackett" (2018) about my article that also appeared in Contemporary Pragmatism entitled "Why James Can Be an Existential Pluralist" (2017). At the heart of my response lies a concern with what I call the principle of hermeneutic charity and the final view James offers us of his entire philosophy. One can recognize the need for historical accuracy and the need to investigate first-order claims that come from historically accurate interpretations.

Klein, Alexander. "The Death of Consciousness? James's Case against Psychological Unobservables." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* **58, no. 2 (April 2020): 293-323.**
https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2020.0040

Received wisdom has it that psychologists and philosophers came to mistrust consciousness for largely behaviorist reasons. But by the time John Watson had published his behaviorist manifesto in 1913, a wider revolt against consciousness was already underway. I focus on William James, an earlier influential source of unease

about consciousness. James's mistrust of consciousness grew out of his critique of perceptual elementarism in psychology. This is the view that most mental states are complex, and that psychology's goal is in some sense to analyze these states into their atomic "elements." Just as we cannot (according to James) isolate any atomic, sensory elements in our occurrent mental states, so we cannot distinguish any elemental consciousness from any separate contents. His critique of elementarism depended on an argument against appeals in psychology to unconscious mentality – to unobservables. Perhaps this is ironic, but his thought is that pure consciousness is itself just as invisible to introspection as isolated, simple ideas.

Klein, Alexander. "William James's Objection to Epiphenomenalism." *Philosophy of Science* **86, no. 5 (2019): 1179-90.**
https://doi.org/10.1086/705477

James developed an evolutionary objection to epiphenomenalism that is still discussed today. Epiphenomenalists have offered responses that do not grasp its full depth. I thus offer a new reading and assessment of James's objection. Our life-essential, phenomenal pleasures and pains have three features that suggest that they were shaped by selection, according to James: they are natively patterned, those patterns are systematically linked with antecedent brain states, and the patterns are "universal" among humans. If epiphenomenalism were true, phenomenal patterns could not have been selected (because epiphenomenalism precludes phenomenal consciousness affecting reproductive success). So epiphenomenalism is likely false.

Kim, Chae Young. "A Sketch on Daisaku Ikeda as a Jamesian Psychologist of Religion." *Religions* **10, no. 11 (2019): 607-18.**
https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10110607

This essay attempts to determine whether Daisaku Ikeda can be seen as a Jamesian psychologist of religion. Concerning the development of this essay, it first focuses on a common concern that exists if we look at the work of William James and the Psychology of Religion in terms of how it exists as a distinct movement and how it is related to Ikeda's perception of religion within a secular world. Next, this essay articulates his notion of self and the role of mediating symbols as this exists, especially in religion, in discourse, and in the arts in correspondence and relation to James' Psychology of Religion. Finally, this essay critically raises questions that point to further developments as regards the thesis of this article.

LaMothe, Ryan. "Writing towards Death: William James and Sigmund Freud and Sustaining Objects/Practices." *Pastoral Psychology* **68, no. 6 (2019): 651-65.**
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-019-00872-7

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

Mollard, Romain. "Entropy, Eternity, and Unheimlichkeit in William James's Philosophy." *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* **41, no. 1 (January 2020): 32-52.**
https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/761310

[No abstract available]

Oya, Alberto. "Unamuno and James on Religious Faith." *Teorema: International Journal of Philosophy* **39, no. 1 (2020): 85-104.**
https://philpapers.org/rec/OYAUAJ

The aim of this paper is to argue against the received view among Unamuno scholars that Miguel de Unamuno was defending a sort of pragmatic argument for religious faith and that his notion of religious faith as "querer creer" ("wanting to believe") is to be identified with William James's "the will to believe". As I will show in this paper, one of the aspects that makes Unamuno's reasoning philosophically relevant is his ability to formulate a non-pragmatist defense of religious faith without a prior commitment to the truth of any religious or theological statement and grounded in our longing for an endless existence through God's Salvation.

Petrie, Paul R. "W. D. Howells, William James, and the Pragmatist Pluralism of "The Angel of the Lord"." *American Literary Realism* **52, no. 3 (Spring 2020): 211-33.**
https://doi.org/10.5406/amerlitereal.52.3.0211

[No abstract available]

Riedenauer, Markus. "Am Ende der Modernen Sicherheit: William James über Religiöse Erfahrung." [At the End of Modern Security: William James on Religious Experience]. *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* **5, no. 1 (2019): 52-75.**
https://doi.org/10.30965/23642807-00501004

> William James defends religious belief as a reasonable option against a kind of widespread agnosticism which he calls scientific absolutism, and against the dogmatism which he sees in the natural theology of his time. On the basis of his collection of essays *The Will to Believe*, the article reconstructs his arguments and the epistemological foundation of his famous treatment of religious experience in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. James' pragmatistic approach, which he calls radical empiricism, resists the exclusion of "mystical" experiences of conversion and redemption, and of religious faith from the realm of reasonable attitudes. Experiences of the astonishing gift of being, of trust and openness, courage and motivation to endure life's evils can validate religious faith. In so far as modern rationality with its highest expression in the sciences is rooted in an existential quest for security, the underlying attitude towards life unnecessarily prevents personal experiences of the divine and salvation and unreasonably devaluates attitudes of faith. James defends the desiring nature of human beings and opens up the space for legitimate religious experience.

Rodgers, Jordan. "A Modern Polytheism? Nietzsche and James." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* **34, no. 1 (2020): 69-96.**
https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/753447.

> Richard Rorty has argued that Friedrich Nietzsche and William James are both polytheists in the deflationary

sense that they are both pluralists about human value. I argue that there is a more philosophically significant sense in which Nietzsche and James might be called polytheists: both advocate a life of openness and receptivity to multiple and potentially incommensurable sources of inspiration outside of our conscious control. The value of these sources is accessed in experiences in which one feels that one is given something in an experience that one could not have obtained through conscious effort. I argue that this moment of passivity plays a crucial role in both James's treatment of religious experience in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and Nietzsche's account of the state of inspiration he experienced while composing *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and that their deep similarity on this point suggests that Nietzsche is closer to Jamesian religion than he is to Rortyan secularism.

Shardlow, Jack. "A Tale of Two Williams: James, Stern, and the Specious Present." ***Philosophical Explorations*** **23, no. 2 (2020): 79-94.**
https://doi.org/10.1080/13869795.2020.1753803.

As a typical subject, you experience a variety of paradigmatically temporal phenomena. Looking out of the window in the English summer, you can see leaves swaying in the breeze and hear the pitter-patter of raindrops steadily increasing against the window. In discussions of temporal experience, and through reflecting on examples such as those offered, two phenomenological claims are widely - though not unequivocally – accepted: firstly, you perceptually experience motion and change; secondly, while more than a momentary state of affairs is presented in your ongoing perceptual experience, that which is presented nonetheless seems to be of a quite limited temporal extent. These two claims are frequently tied to the notion of the specious present. However, there

has recently been a push back against the supposed link between perceived motion and the specious present. I argue that there are two ways of understanding this link, and while one has recently been the target of criticism, the other withstands such criticism. My overarching aim is to clarify the notion of the specious present through a discussion of the notion's origins, in addition to recent criticism directed at the notion, with the hope of reframing how contemporary debates proceed.

Sheehey, Bonnie. "Methodologies of Travel: William James and the Ambulatory Pragmatism of Bruno Latour." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* **33, no. 4 (2020): 571-89.**
https://doi.org/10.5325/jspecphil.33.4.0571

This article argues for the methodological resonance shared by Bruno Latour and William James in order to understand Latour's affiliation with pragmatism. Unlike many readers of Latour, I suggest that his relation with pragmatism is primarily methodological rather than primarily ontological. To clarify this, I look to the resonances between James's methodological pragmatism and Latour's actor-network methodology. Latour's pragmatism resonates with James's as it incorporates a methodological focus on practices and objects, and as it furthers underdeveloped themes of motion in James's pragmatism. This methodological alliance, I argue, consists in a modification of the metaphoric of method from one of Cartesian construction to one of movement and travel.

Sheehey, Bonnie. "To Bear the Past as a Living Wound: William James and the Philosophy of History." *Journal of the Philosophy of History* **13, no. 3 (2019): 325-42.**
https://doi.org/10.1163/18722636-12341431

Philosophers generally recognize pragmatism as a philosophy of progress. For many commentators, pragmatism is linked to a notion of historical progress through its embrace of meliorism – a forward-looking philosophy that places hope in the future possibility of improvement. This paper calls pragmatism's progressivism into question by outlining an alternative account of meliorism in the work of William James. Drawing on his ethical writings from the 1870s and 1880s, I argue that James's concept of hope does not imply an embrace of historical progress, but remains detached from such a notion precisely insofar as it relies on a non-progressive temporality that encourages a rethinking of historical change. This form of hope is significant, I suggest, for the work of conceptualizing a non-progressive pragmatist approach to history and historiography.

Stepanenko, Walter Scott. "A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking: Pragmatism, Radical Empiricism, and Epistemology in W.E.B. Du Bois's "Of the Sorrow Songs"." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* **87, no. 2 (April 2020): 173-92.**
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-019-09717-y

When William James published *Pragmatism*, he gave it a subtitle: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking. In this article, I argue that pragmatism is an epistemological method for articulating success in, and between, a plurality of practices, and that this articulation helped James develop radical empiricism. I contend that this pluralistic philosophical methodology is evident in James's approach to philosophy of religion, and that this method is also

exemplified in the work of one of James's most famous students, W.E.B. Du Bois, specifically in the closing chapter of The Souls of Black Folk, "Of the Sorrow Songs." I argue that "Sorrow Songs" can be read as an epistemological text, and that once one identifies the epistemic standards of pragmatism and radical empiricism in the text, it's possible to identify an implicit case for moderate fideism in "Sorrow Songs." I contend that this case illuminates the pluralistic philosophical methodology James worked throughout his career to develop, and that the James-Du Bois approach to philosophy may even help locate the epistemic value of other religious practices, beyond the singing of hymns, and identify terrain mainstream philosophy has long neglected.

Stepanenko, Walter Scott. "The Fruits of the Unseen: A Jamesian Challenge to Explanatory Reductionism in Accounts of Religious Experience." *Open Theology* **6, no. 1 (2020): 54-65. https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0007**

In *Religious Experience*, Wayne Proudfoot argued that a tout court rejection of reductionism in accounts of religious experience was not viable. According to Proudfoot, it's possible to distinguish between an illegitimate practice of descriptive reductionism and the legitimate practice of explanatory reductionism. The failure to distinguish between these two forms of reductionism resulted in a protective strategy, or an attempt to protect religious experience from the reach of scientific explanation. Among the theorists whom he accused of deploying this illegitimate strategy Proudfoot included William James and his work in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In this article, I argue that while James does occasionally deploy a protective strategy in *Varieties*, this is not the only nor most important method of treating religious experience James developed. Implicit in his rejection of medical

materialism, James not only deploys the protective strategy Proudfoot criticizes, but the pragmatic method with which he treats all claims. I argue that James's pragmatic method leads to what James called noetic pluralism, or the view that there is no privileged knowledge practice, but a plurality of knowledge practices, and that this method puts pressure on the explanatory reductionist, who is implicitly committed to noetic monism.