

RELATED SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS ON JAMES

November 2017 – May 2018



In recognition of the fact that James scholars are publishing articles in other academic journals, the editors feel that it is important to keep our readers informed of the diversity within Jamesian scholarship by drawing attention to relevant publications outside of *WJS*. The Periodicals section of the journal aims to provide our readers with information about related scholarly 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, Kyle Bromhall, at periodicals@williamjamesstudies.org and we will include it at the next opportunity.



Dianda, Alexis. “William James and the ‘Wilfulness’ of Belief.”
European Journal of Philosophy 26, no. 1 (March 2018): 647–62.

This paper explicates and defends some of William James’ more controversial claims in “The Will to Believe.” After showing some of the weaknesses in standard interpretations of James’ position, I turn to James’ *Principles of Psychology* and *The Varieties of Religious Experience* to spell out in more detail James’ account of the nature of the attitudes of belief, doubt, and disbelief and link them to an account of the subject. In so doing, the moral force of the argument comes to the fore by casting the question ‘Can we believe at will?’ in a new light. Through a discussion of the conversion experiences of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and the kinds of self-transformations in which beliefs that once appeared dead become live (or vice versa) that appear throughout James’ psychology, the moral urgency of James’ position in “The Will to Believe” is clarified.

Gundlach, H. “William James and the Heidelberg Fiasco.”
History of Psychology 21, no. 1 (2018): 47–72.

Urged on by his father to become a physician instead of a painter, William James pursued three evasion stratagems. First, to avoid becoming a practitioner, he declared that he wanted to specialize in physiology. Based upon this premise, he left for Germany in the spring of 1867. The second step was giving up general physiology and announcing that he would specialize in the nervous system and psychology. Based upon this premise, he declared that he would go to Heidelberg and study with Helmholtz and Wundt. However, he then deferred going there. When, at

last, he was urged by an influential friend of his father's to accompany him to Heidelberg, he employed his default stratagem: He simply fled. He returned home after three terms in Europe without enrolling at a single university. There is no evidence that he had learned anything there about psychology or experimental psychology, except, possibly, by reading books. James's "Heidelberg fiasco" was the apogee of his evasion of his father's directive. A dense fog of misinformation surrounds his stay in Heidelberg to this day. By analyzing circumstances and context, this article examines the fiasco and places it in the pattern of his behavior during his stay in Europe. Nevertheless, experiencing this fiasco potentially shaped James's ambivalent attitude toward experimental psychology on a long-term basis.

Jensen, Graham. "Beyond the Temple and the Cave: William James, E.J. Pratt, and Christian-Spiritualist Syncretisms." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 1–26.

Although the Canadian poet E.J. Pratt had lifelong attachments to the Methodist and then United Church, critics have struggled to reconcile the various aspects of Pratt's religious vision as they materialize in his writing. Focusing on one largely ignored aspect of that vision, this article examines Pratt's mystical and spiritualist poetry of the 1920s and 1930s. More precisely, it considers Pratt's blending of spiritualist and Christian thought in relation to the syncretistic, non-dogmatic, anti-institutional notion of "personal religion" advanced in William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, thus illuminating at once both Pratt's religious commitments and a seldom-discussed point of contact between James's philosophy and modernist

literature. Ultimately, this article argues that, as a result of his exposure to James and to spiritualism in the crucible of Toronto's liberal Protestant milieu, Pratt – like many other writers of his time – began to move beyond the polarities of personal and institutional religion.

Moon, Jane S., Catherine M. Kuza, and Manisha S. Desai. “William James, Nitrous Oxide, and the Anaesthetic Revelation.” *Journal of Anesthesia History* 4, no. 1 (Jan 2018): 1–6.

William James greatly influenced the fields of psychology, philosophy, and religion during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was the era of Modernism, a time when many writers rejected the certainty of Enlightenment ideals. Positivism, which rose to prominence in the early 19th century, had emphasized physical phenomena, empirical evidence, and the scientific method. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), with its theory of natural selection, provided an explanation for the evolution of species apart from a divine Creator. Within this context, William James served as a “mediator between scientific agnosticism and the religious view of the world.” James' own experience inhaling nitrous oxide played an important role in shaping his views. For James, the use of nitrous oxide served a key role in elucidating some of his most central ideas: 1) the value of religion, and the emphasis on mysticism and revelation (as opposed to theology and doctrine) as religion's foundation; 2) the universe as pluralistic (as opposed to absolutist, constant, eternal), driven by chance, experience, and change.

Pott, Heleen. “Why Bad Moods Matter: William James on Melancholy, Mystic Emotion, and the Meaning of Life.” *Philosophia* 45, no. 4 (Dec 2017): 1635–45.

A number of philosophers have called into question the wishful thinking reading of “The Will to Believe.” According to them, William James is not encouraging us to will what we want to believe; rather, he is making the case that under certain epistemic conditions we have a right to believe. I contend that this right to believe thesis, while an important part of James’s essay, fails to capture his full view. First, I inquire into what James means by ‘our passional nature.’ I distinguish three roles the passional nature plays with respect to belief. I then illustrate how each role of the passional nature informs three related arguments within the “The Will to Believe.” Ultimately, I argue that James is not simply advocating the permissibility of religious belief. His primary thesis is that individuals who have a right to believe ought to believe.

Vandenberghe, Frédéric. “Experiments with Truth. A Sociological Variation on William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience*.” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 48, no. 1 (March 2018): 31–47.

William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* is a classic psycho-philosophical study of the experience of the sacred and of its practical effects on the ordinary life of extraordinary persons. In a pragmatic variation of Kant’s proof of god’s existence, James uses personal accounts of converts to empirically demonstrate that there’s “something” that has causal effects on the well-being of the person. While the article is largely sympathetic to James explorations of the mystical, it offers a sociological

variation on the *Varieties* that foregrounds the social, cultural and political aspects of religion.

Williams, Neil W. “Absolutism, Relativism and Anarchy: Alain Locke and William James on Value Pluralism.” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 53, no. 3 (Summer 2017): 400–24.

This paper aims to compare the pluralistic theories of James and Locke on the three criteria by which Locke proposes that any pluralistic axiology should be assessed: normativity, objectivity and loyalty. A pluralistic account of value must be able to account for the normativity of particular value systems without appealing to universal standards. It must be able to provide some objective ground for value so that different values can be constructively compared across cultures, without becoming monistic. And it must provide an account which still allows people to find their particular values meaningful and motivating, whilst at the same time encouraging tolerance for differing values. The conclusion of the paper will be that, despite Locke’s accusation of anarchism, James’s appeal to a limited form of realism means that his theory is better placed to meet these three criteria.