

RADICAL EMPIRICISM AND THE METAPHYSICS OF RELATIONS

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While most classical pragmatist scholars who work on William James appreciate radical empiricism, little has been said up to now about the ontological status of relations in James's radical empiricism. As is the case here, I wish to rectify this neglected trend and briefly sketch the onto-relational concepts as they appear in James's "Does Consciousness Exist" and "A World of Pure Experience." For the reasons contained in this essay, James's *Essays on Radical Empiricism* stands out as one of the first times in Western philosophy, though certainly not in all philosophy, that a processive conception of experience is privileged over rationalist conceptions of experience. This posits both privileged access to some previously inaccessible domain of knowledge and erroneously characterizes experience as ontologically dualistic. The reification of philosophical nouns like "consciousness" and "body" can be explained when we consider the metaphysical status of relations in James's thought.



1. JAMES'S CRITIQUE OF IMMANUEL KANT'S TRANSCENDENTAL EGO AND CONSCIOUSNESS MORE GENERALLY

James situates his critique of consciousness amidst standard historical binaries of thought and thing, spirit and matter, and soul and body. According to James, these binaries, which hail back as far as Plato, are equipollent substances. “Throughout the history of philosophy the subject and object have been treated as absolutely discontinuous entities.”¹ Moreover, these words all describe the same bipolar relation, albeit with different terms. The subjective side associated with thought, spirit, and soul are equal in power and ability with the corresponding objective side with thing, matter, and body. What remains unclear is the reasons James singles out Kant as undermining “the soul.” By introducing the transcendental ego, Kant has made this traditional bipolar relation “very much off its balance.”² In this way, we might infer that James thinks Kant is a historical marker where the soul is no longer equipollent with the body. Of course, this is an inference that is not supported by James’s text. I am still left asking: Why might James think Kant’s innovation of the transcendental ego introduces this off-balance view of a distinction that he will radically revise and reinterpret? In order to understand that, let’s review Kant’s notion of the transcendental ego.

For Kant, the term *transcendental* refers to the *possible conditions of possible experience*. Kant’s concern is to provide an analysis of knowledge by tracing all knowledge to necessary pure truths of experience, thereby explicating the starting position of human knowledge. By doing so, Kant can show what rules make experience possible and allow us to know objects of experience in the way we do. Unlike the rationalists, like Descartes alluded to in earlier chapters, Kant will not find certainty in metaphysical speculation. In fact, Kant’s critical turn is to halt metaphysical speculation altogether. For Kant, human experience receives the

J. Edward Hackett

sensible forms of intuition as space and time and then imposes on the manifold of these appearances the meaningful content imposed by the categories of understanding. Kant, like James, thinks that our concepts produced by the understanding cannot access that which simply appears. In fact, Kant calls that which appears *phenomena* and the in-itself true nature of reality (what he calls *noumena*) is beyond our ability to access. Kant's splitting the world into categories of sensibility and appearance (*phenomenon*) on the one side and, on the other side, intelligibility and *noumenon* also means there is a world where true being could possibly be known. As James said, "Transcendental idealism is inclining to let the world wag incomprehensibly."³ As he describes elsewhere about transcendental idealism, "It posits an unknown reality, but it tells us that this reality always presents us in two aspects, consciousness on one side and matter on the other."⁴ In thinking that we can have knowledge of the noumena, one must introduce some faculty capable of accessing the in-itself reality that lies beyond appearance. Kant calls this intellectual intuition. Descartes called this simply reason. Accordingly, this intellectual intuition "forms no part whatsoever of our faculty of knowledge, it follows that the employment of the categories can never extend further than to the objects of experience."⁵ In some ways, Kant anticipates the arrival of James; in other ways, he doesn't.

While a full rehearsal of Kant's project is not my goal, we can talk further about what "off-balance" might mean for Kant's introduction of the transcendental ego. Kant introduces the term transcendental ego in his *Critique of Pure Reason* in the section "The Original Synthetic Unity of Apperception." In this section, Kant explains why all the disparate elements of both sensible forms of intuition of space and time and the categories of the understanding are experienced in the unity of consciousness. In fact, this unity is necessary to explain why I experience my representations within this unity of experience. For this reason, Kant opens this section with:

It must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me.⁶

In other words, the unity of my transcendental ego (or what he also calls self-consciousness) is the origin as to why I can claim representations as consistently belonging to me.⁷

Kant's claim follows upon the heels of phrases like "belonging to me" and "my representations." In this way, the representations of the world embody what James might call the not-me, and yet there's no clear boundary between the way in which both the not-me objective world and the originating act of synthesis in consciousness creates the unity of experience. Even though for Kant, experience never exceeds that which appears, the transcendental ego becomes, as it were, that which appears to me as the precondition for all experience. The many elements of knowledge can only be knowledge because "I can unite a manifold of given representations in one consciousness."⁸ This original synthesis is continually ongoing, uniting the various elements of knowledge into one consciousness and this continual synthesis in consciousness provides law-like regularity to my experience. For this reason, the world of bodies and the objective side of experience no longer matters or has any importance for experience. According to James, consciousness as an overly powerful concept takes center stage for Kantian and Neo-Kantian thinking.

Kant's mistake is, I think, that this transcendental unity is an objective facet of all experience. Experience is divorced from all particulars and thematized in an impersonal schematism. As James describes Kantian thinking, "Consciousness as such is impersonal—'self' and its activities belong to content."⁹ This impersonalization of consciousness, then, turns consciousness into an "epistemological necessity" that we might have to accept even if we had no evidence of it being there.¹⁰ In other words, while we can accept the Kantian critique that experience should be understood as solely within the

J. Edward Hackett

confines of space and time, Kant is still operating with the interpretation of consciousness as an entity, as something extricated from the world of which it happens to have representations. There is a strict metaphysical line between mind and world that is not exactly obliterated despite experience being confined within space and time.

Consciousness is an entity still considered in Kant and is essentially guilty of possessing a “dualistic inner constitution.” This picture of consciousness is false for reasons I have yet to explain, but this picture of Kant and other Neo-Kantians is the opening through which James will inaugurate his critique of consciousness as an entity and speculative metaphysics about relations more generally. Let’s now examine the more general claims about consciousness itself.

William James does not think consciousness is a separate ontological term. Against Descartes and Kant, James denies consciousness “stands for an entity but to insist most emphatically that it does stand in for a function.”¹¹ Instead, he writes that experience “has no such inner duplicity.”¹² Instead, there is no essential separation between these terms, and one is reminded of Dewey in seeing a distinction not as necessarily drawn but as a functional aspect of experience. This functional language does not deny that there is no awareness of content or that thought does not occur. James only underscores that experience is taken as it is undergone, almost in a near quasi-phenomenological fashion. Just as in phenomenology, James introduces the term pure experience to describe the fact that there are co-relational terms on both sides of an overall structure of experience.

Pure experience equals the relation itself. On one side of the relation is the subject as the bearer of knowledge, as the one whose consciousness is streaming forth in dynamic relations. On the other side of the same relation is the object known. In other words, experience is, as James described, double-barreled. The mistake that Kant and Descartes make is in assuming the soul/body, spirit/matter, and thought/thing—all of which are the same binary relation—are essential dualisms. Taken functionally, James reinterprets those dualisms. The reinterpreted dualism is “verifiable and concrete” and

is no longer “mysterious and elusive.” Instead, James claims that “*experience is an affair of relations.*”¹³ Again, like a phenomenologist, James describes a scenario to explicate this double-barreled, functional, and what I would call “onto-relational dyadic structure.” In his own words, “Consciousness has consciousness of.”¹⁴ Accordingly, we can only experience particular *thats*. In those particular *thats*, pure experience is described as “the instant field of the present,” and experience is coming to us without first having been designated metaphysically. Instead, the pure experience “is only virtually or potentially either object or subject as yet.”¹⁵ Experience is raw, undifferentiated, and wholly relational until our retrospection and attention looks at it and enters that relation. The relation of experience, then, manifests in a context and in conjunction with its associates. Only then does it acquire meaning.

Consider your experience of reading in a room. The room is a collection of physical things carved out in distinction from the surrounding environment. The books next to me on the table, papers, and the library all stand in potential and actual relation to me. Once I leave the room, the books, table, papers, and library exist in my mind as actual and potential relations. So, the perception example reveals that reading in my study is, in fact, a set of actual and potential relations of experience that exist in both thought and world simultaneously. Experience contains both sides of this relation and may be entered and taken up from either side in its wholeness—whether it come from the mental side or the more physical side. As existent in thought, the room experience belongs to my personal history. I have only lived in this dwelling since relocating to Baton Rouge in August 2020.

Next, the room as a facet in the objective world is so-and-so wide and across. It can fit this many books and no more. It’s located in a third-floor apartment. My room experience may start in either way as primarily seen through the trajectory of thought or thing. The room experiences *terminus a quo* can be me thinking about the room as I try to recall where I placed a certain book I cannot locate, or it can be me looking on the shelf for the missing volume. Likewise,

J. Edward Hackett

either direction may end the experience. The room experience's *terminus ad quem* may end when I locate the missing volume, or as I go onto and transition into another relation of leaving the library to go to the kitchen, or when I remember that the missing volume is, in fact, on campus and not in the study.

From these efforts, James provides a radical empiricist scaffolding for all experience. The thought-of-an-object and the object-thought-of may be described as our attention looking at one side of this experiential structure. However, I should emphasize that these terms are always conjoined. Simply because our descriptive efforts are looking at the room experience as thought-of does not mean that we are forgetting the other side. In fact, that's the heart of James's opening critique against the history of philosophy. The bipolar relation is non-existent even though he seemingly started with a dualistic tendency in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890). It never was and yet our entire philosophical and theological vocabularies in Western philosophy have been insistent on the metaphysical difference between spirit and matter. Thus, for James to revolutionize metaphysics and to describe a functional definition of consciousness as pure experience opens a floodgate that stands as James's lasting contribution to metaphysics. This longstanding impact in metaphysics can be seen in his definition of consciousness:

Consciousness connotes a kind of external relation, and does not denote a special stuff or way of being. *The peculiarity of our experiences, that they not only are, but are known, which their "conscious" quality is invoked to explain, is better explained by their relations—these relations themselves being experiences to one another.*¹⁶

In this passage, consciousness always terminates in an external relation—what we might call an object in the world. Moreover, James finally draws some conclusions about ontological equivalence. A concatenation of experiences are all relations, and so experiences are not reducible to anything other than how they function in life as relations. Consciousness is, therefore, pure

experience, which is the ontology of relations. One may extrapolate that part of the longstanding influence (rightly or wrongly) stemming from James is that only relations are real. This is the thesis we take up when looking at radical empiricism in his “A World of Pure Experience,” and more importantly a fact to which all religious interpretations of our relations cannot deny.

2. ELUCIDATING THE STRUCTURES OF PURE EXPERIENCE

In this essay and second chapter of *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, James confesses to seeing a pattern that he cannot alter. This pattern or worldview is the radical empiricism he endorsed as early as 1895, though the refinements were still occurring a decade later.¹⁷ Already in this book, I have addressed radical empiricism as laying the foundational elements of those passages. These passages inform the most important aspects of what radical empiricism is, and so they bear repeating. In his “A World of Pure Experience,” James writes,

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. *For such a philosophy* [metaphysics, I suggest], *the relations that connect experience must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as “real” as anything else in the system.* Elements may indeed be redistributed, the original placing of things getting corrected, but a real place must be found for every kind of thing experienced, whether term or relation, —in the final philosophical [and therefore metaphysical] arrangement.¹⁸

Most importantly, as my interpretation shows, only relations and persons are real. That’s the radicality of this passage confronting both us and the entire history of philosophy. To say that only relations and persons are real is not to say that the terms of relations do not exist, but it is to emphasize a dynamic “ongoingness” that any particular term cannot be extricated out of how people experience the term in relation to another term. If some content can

J. Edward Hackett

be experienced directly, then it is one of the terms in a relation and therefore deserving of the label “real.” The point of this passage is that relations run into each other in our shared capacities for experience and independently of us within nature. They vary and change. Moreover, one interpretation of an experience may be wrong or mislabeled, meaning looked at from either the subjective side or the objective side. Finally, if our interpretations omit a relation, then we must revise our interpretations and find a place for that arrangement in any “final philosophical arrangement.”

The final philosophical arrangement is somewhat ignored in James scholarship. It should not be. Read correctly, the final philosophical arrangement here is autobiographical. James is purposely trying to create and foster a metaphysical vision which includes any experienced relation as equally real as another. A *de facto* pluralism is the consequence of such an open-mindedness to what experience is and how it functions on an irreducible level. In other words, the term “real” is not simply an honorific, but conveys James’s metaphysical judgment that if something can be experienced in a relation, then that qualitative feature is not simply *in the mind* à la idealism any more than meaning is *outside the mind* à la materialism. These are, in fact, problems settled by the blurring of the two sides of our shared onto-relationality. In fact, the world is pure experience, indicating a move to embrace talking about the world in process as if the subjective folded into the objective and the objective, while relatively stable, also folds into the subjective. In this way, the world is the space into which meanings collapse into each other, may be associated with each other, and manifest in different contexts across the spectrum of experience and what people interpret the relations to be within that context. Philosophers no longer should seek ontological remedy for kinds and categories without reference to this intersubjective space to which all meaning is given and to which all essentialism may dissolve into action.

What James avoids here is the finality of any philosophical system. James did not like final solutions and ultimate pronouncements. Pluralism is a result, as John McDermott tells us, of James’s doctrine of relations. “Things, events, hang together by

relations, in a network which in the long run is empirically vague, no matter what proximate clarity we may attain.” James continues, “Nothing can be fully understood by itself, for every experience we have reaches, potentially, ever other perceivable aspect of reality.”¹⁹ There is no object that is not in potential and actual relation to others. In this way, there is no single vantage point, no perspective that transcends how these relations unfurl in time. Every person makes their contribution with their perspective in relation to others. “[H]ow the world comes to be me for me is in some way due to the world has come to be for the other, for you.”²⁰ Our knowledge is shaped by the purposes of others, and the world responds to our efforts in the just the same way that it does for others. In this way, the world’s meaning is co-constituted by our shared ability to utilize our wills to realize meaning into action.

The world can come to be familiar and strange, intimate and external. “Relations are of different degrees of intimacy.”²¹ In this way we can list them vertically as he does from the most external and lacking intimacy to internal and possessing intimacy. Let’s list them in order of their appearance in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*: Witness, Simultaneity and Time-Intervals, Space Adjacency and Distance, Similarity and Difference, Activity, which means “tying terms into a series involving change, tendency, resistance, and the causal order generally.”²²

Relations are experienced between terms.²³ The top of this list is the least intimate and the final relation of those things experienced between terms pertain to those relations occurring in our experience. In other words, the most external relations really imply a chaos of varying actual and potential relations that I may experience someday, but that also imply a cacophonous melody of emerging and receding songs of relations beyond me. This chaos announces itself as a universe that hangs together some and where not all relations of my experience map onto the occurrences of the universe. Many gradations of the universe are possible, but as James reminds us, “Taken as it does appear, our universe is to a large extent chaotic. No one single type of connection runs through all the experiences that compose it.”²⁴ I will pick up on this theme in the next section.

J. Edward Hackett

For now, I will continue unpacking what James means by conjunctive relations.

3. CONJUNCTIVE RELATIONS

James informs us that radical empiricism is the middle position between the extremes of rationalism and empiricism. On the one hand, in an extreme empiricist universe all the varying experiences we have tend to dangle on those experiences save the fact that experiences terminate in perceptual acts. Each experience's content in empiricism is isolated, atomic, and likened to the many feathers that dangle on a dry human head of the tribes of Borneo.²⁵ “[T]he empiricists [leave] things permanently disjoined.”²⁶ There's a general withness, a bare relation over-emphasized against the rationalist. The rationalist, on the other hand, over-emphasizes the intimate belongingness of all experienced content as absorbed and immersed in an over-arching universal Absolute Mind. “[T]he rationalists [remedy] looseness [of things] by their Absolutes, substances, or whatever other fictitious agencies of union they may have employed.”²⁷ In this image, James compared the experiencing self to swimming in an enclosed crystal globe aquarium. Somehow, the lack of intimacy and the ever-presence of intimacy, what James calls disconnection and unity, should be thematized.

Since both disconnection and unity are aspects of our experience, James thinks that a middle position—that is, radical empiricism, will be “fair to both unity and the disconnection.”²⁸ In this way, we find a middle position that I think formed from two implicit and dormant tendencies in James. The first is that the chaos alluded to in the next section is the indifferent but still onto-relational universe that unrolls in time beyond me. That's what the disconnection is, those relations that are manifesting in a post-Darwinian framework. The post-Darwinian framework manifests as the activity and change in a growing universe to which any religious interpretation cannot help but ignore. Finally, James also has a will-to-believe religious belief in the fact that “there appear to be actual forces at work which tend, as time goes on, to make the unity greater.”²⁹ Whether it is faith in us to improve the world for the

better, what James calls meliorism, or that a divine being is weaving itself through the better parts of human experience, the result is a practical faith that unity will ultimately win out against disconnection. It is a faith that if activities are partly controlled by human beings, then human beings are interacting with something greater than themselves that calls us out of ourselves into growth and expansion. Our individual purposes unite with larger cosmic purposes. This practical faith also manifests itself as experience acquires a unity in this faith; there are still many fragments lost and independent of the faith for that unity. Implicit in this movement is the movement of the One and the Many at the heart of what could metaphysically be animating James's articulation of these concepts.³⁰

James does not speak of this implicit religious moment in "A World of Pure Experience," even if one were to infer from essays authored long ago in his own personal history that both practical and aesthetic interests that mark the experiencer's interest come to integrate and manifest within oneself as he did in "Sentiment of Rationality." These aesthetic and practical interests are mirrored in what James thinks is the most problematic relation, *the co-conscious transition* relation. This relation is the interval that binds varying experiences of the same self together. Let's return to James's own words on this point:

The conjunctive relation that has given most trouble to philosophy is *the co-conscious transition*, so to call it, by which one experience passes into another when both belong to the same self. About the facts there is no question. My experiences and your experiences are "with" each other in various external ways, but mine pass into mine, and yours pass into yours in a way which yours and mine never pass into one another. Within each of our personal histories, subject, object, interest, and purpose *are continuous or may be continuous*. Personal histories are processes of change in time, and *the change itself is one of the things immediately experienced*.³¹

J. Edward Hackett

In the passage above, the guiding thread is the metaphysics of the experiencer. Notice that James does not presuppose an interpretation of the self/experiencer. He outlines that the self is not what is the same. Instead, the metaphysical problem of relations is the effect these relations have on the experiencer. Before they are classified between thought and thing, the contents of these co-conscious transition relations are added between what the consciousness selects in its field of attention and what already exists in the world our arrival. The selective interest of our field of attention and the contexts it inhabits with its attendant associates encircles the relations of experience. James does not know if in truth what side of our relation, be it subject, object, interest, or purpose are continuous through and through. To render judgment on that point, we'd need to access the becoming of reality almost as if to sail into and enter the thing-in-itself. Since change is a condition under which reality is experienced, we could not enter and access the becoming of reality itself any more than we could transgress the thing-in-itself's reality in Kant's gap between mind and world.

The becoming of reality is itself simply a co-conscious relation. We are aware of this relation, and we could, like a Hegelian, think that this relation is continuous through and through. The Hegelian mistake is to think that only continuous change is the only changing relation. The Heraclitean flux could be made as rigid a fact about reality as any other piece of our experience. According to James, however, we experience continuous and discontinuous change. Some experiences endure longer than others, but the field of our attention shifts, and increasing the transitions we are conscious of does not merit reifying co-conscious transition as continuous change only. If we do reify the theme of change in that way, then we let in the corrupting force of Hegelian "dialectics and all the metaphysical fictions [that] pour into our philosophy."³² Instead, we should take conjunctive relations as they occur. We should take this experience "at its face value, neither less nor more" but "just as we feel it, and not confuse ourselves with abstract talk *about* it."³³ Notice James saying we should note these conjunctive relations "as we feel it" to the point that felt relations are ontologically constitutive of our

experience in a way that contrasts deeply with the way the history of philosophy has emphasized reason over the emotions. In this way, we should not describe or read into these continuous changing relations we are conscious of any more content than is absolutely necessary. By contrast, the Hegelian and the rationalist both read more into continuous changing co-conscious transitions than the pragmatist does. They read more into the continuous change and chaos. The pragmatist will be honest when faced with a metaphysical or theological belief that extends over and against how experience functions for the exigent personal demand life generates within the experienter. The radical empiricist is simply honest about the onto-relational origin of such beliefs and the ontological scaffolding radical empiricism provides for these relations.

To end, conjunctive relations are the ones I encounter and to which add to the creative novelty of my experience. However, these relations are all intimately bound up with the attention I have of myself in those relations. There are continuous co-transition relations that at times are continuous with me and my attention in the field of consciousness. There are also times in which discontinuity breaks the field of my attention in immediate experience and where I clearly “make the transition from an experience of my own to one of yours.”³⁴ In breaking my attention and moving to a more intersubjective experience in which something may be shared between us, conjunctive relations are both continuous and more intimate and discontinuous and more external. Moreover, any chaos of experience is not a totalizing chaos because any intersubjective experience is a shared one with shared meanings and habits that we might share with each other. This gives the reality of experience something on which to hang, which only makes the chaos of these relations ever only a partial quasi-chaos.

Taking to heart how we undergo experiences of co-conscious transition of conjunctive relations in either continuous change or discontinuous change is better than living under the illusion that the *relation between knower and known* are absolutely discontinuous with each other. The illusion of the gap is where one side of the subject stands against and over the world out there and beyond me.

J. Edward Hackett

Representative theories posited that content of an idea pictures and copies the world outside me. Common sense approaches leave the gap between knower and known unblemished and the transcendental idealists (or idealistic monists) introduce some fictitious absolute or substance to close that gap. Radical empiricism and making a place for continuous changing relations and discontinuous changing relations contains all we need to know about the knower and known. According to James, then, either the knower and the known are:

- (1) the self-same piece of experience taken twice over in different contexts; or they are
- (2) two pieces of *actual* experience belonging to the same subject, with definite tracts of conjunctive transitional experience between them; or
- (3) the known is a *possible* experience either of that subject or another, to which the said conjunctive transitions *would* lead, if sufficiently prolonged.³⁵

In this passage, (1) resembles the earlier room experience. The room can be given in my personal history or as an object with its own physical realities. In (2) actual experience consists of relations that take place within space and time. They occur in spatio-temporality and have specific duration for me. The concrete is always personalized in James.³⁶ In (3), the object is elevated or privileged as a possibility. The known traffic patterns in Baton Rouge may delay or enhance my ability to go home. As possibility, the object known has concrete implications for possible futures.

What separates (2) and (3) are specific claims about knowledge by direct acquaintance, as in (2), or how a concrete known possibility may lead into a percept or furthermore seem abstracted from experience as a concept while not truly being so abstracted. Conceptual knowledge is a roadblock that James is unwilling to confront at this point in the essay even though he claims that concepts can always be reduced to percepts.³⁷ In other words, concepts always lead to percepts. The cognitive relation of the knower-known dyad consists in how well either side leads to action. In this way, James will repeat that concepts lead to percepts, or that

concepts allow some coordinate problem-solving. The problem-solving is always directed into *this world*. So the choice of construing rules of equivalence and rules of inference in Russell's logic as eternal leads to the concrete action of applying the same rules consistently in proofs, regardless if I am right or not to interpret the metaphysical status of the same rules as eternal in the mind of God or simply in it being my choice to regard them as invariant. Both interpretations absolutize the consistency that's necessary to regard those rules as operating in particular proof strategies in the here and now. James's example is recalling the name Memorial Hall or a vague mental image of it in terms of its position in relation to other buildings. Insofar as both ways of starting our knowledge function to get me to Memorial Hall, there should be no difference between these starting positions. They both pertain to leading me to the percept "Memorial Hall."

Knowledge is always practical and returns to goal-oriented action. The sensible world comes to life conceptually only after we apply those concepts subsequently. Consider,

Knowledge of sensible realities thus comes to life inside the tissue of experience. It is made; and made by relations that unroll themselves in time. Whenever certain intermediaries are given, such that, as they develop towards their terminus, there is experience from point to point of one direction followed, and finally of one process fulfilled, the result is that *their starting-point thereby becomes a knower and their terminus an object meant or known*. That is all that knowing (in the simplest case considered) can be known-as, that is the whole of its nature, put into experiential terms. Whenever such a sequence of our experiences we may freely say that we had the terminal object in mind from the outset, even although *at* the outset nothing was there in us but a flat piece of substantive experience like any other, with no self-transcendence about it, and no mystery save the mystery of coming into existence and of being gradually followed by other pieces of substantive experience, with conjunctively transitional experiences between...Of any deeper more real way of being in mind we have no positive conception, and we have no right to discredit our actual experience by talking of such a way at

J. Edward Hackett

all.³⁸

In other words, meaning is made and responds to particulars in the world. The knower and the known always return to the same world within space and time and to which immediate experience is necessarily entwined. “Experience as a whole is a process in time.”³⁹ There is no knowledge beyond the “tissue of experience,” and there is no self-transcendence of knowledge. Instead, all knowledge occurs here and rolls in and out of change and flux. Terms lapse into awareness and then fade away. If we were to speculate beyond this continuous transition in the field of our immediate experience, then we would thereby discredit our experience by displacing and privileging an illusory interpretation for the concrete phenomenological experience radical empiricism provides.

An immediate implication is, of course, that religion orientates our direction, which includes the many facets of our affective intentionality in this world for some unseen order. Religious commitments orient our existential and radically empirical position only. The unseen order is always outside the scope of that which calls us in our present immediacy but to which there is no definitive interpretation. Instead, whatever the function such an unseen order may have, its truth lies in the function it provides. In other words, the percept’s existence is the guarantee of how knowledge and our relations return us to the concrete exigency of the present. The percept’s existence, James reminds, is “the terminus of the chain of intermediaries” and it “creates the function” of what the concept had in mind the whole time.⁴⁰ For this reason, I am locating the content of unseen order as concretizing in the social mindset of melioristic individuals who wish to work for a world larger than themselves and also a confrontation with the concrete aspects of finitude to which earthly life culminates in death. Finitude, community, and values are some concrete functions to which religious concepts push us to see even when we would rather selfishly serve our own interests.

Without the function religious concepts concretely facilitate, religious concepts serve as a stark contrast to what James calls “the quasi-chaos” of our experiences. The amount of discontinuity in our

experience is more common than our Western philosophical tradition might like to think. On the one hand, our concepts map onto percepts and we take that to be the existential and metaphysical necessity of James's system. However, there are times when past philosophers mistake a concept for a percept or ignore the need for concepts to facilitate experience completely. In this way, the vicious intellectualism of philosophical systems occurs because of wrongful substitution. Substituting a concept where a percept would end such experiences leads to a range of mistakes. In this way, thought-paths do not terminate in action, but lead to a type of conceptual fantasy land. These "thought-paths" are "substitutes for nothing actual; they end outside the real world altogether, in wayward fancies, utopias, fictions, or mistakes."⁴¹

However, if our experiences are relations that unroll in time, then the fact that no religious interpretation of the cosmos holds sway, but certainly a scientific naturalistic account does, then shouldn't we extoll the scientific and the actual over what perhaps James might regard as "wayward fancies, utopias, fictions, or mistakes?" In other words, by the ontological scaffolding of radical empiricism itself, should we not see religion as a substitute for the scientifically described world of immediate experience? This reasoning would work if James, like Clifford, held that religion knew little of anything. Instead, James has always defended religion as a way of being *in* the world and *of* the world. James carves up a space for the possibility that this universe responds to us and we to it. In so doing, James defends religion in principle, even though he will come to admit that the scaffolding of experience and the insights we draw from science must in principle play some role in what religion can be. For this reason, religion is compatible with James's metaphysics of pure experience and science in principle. Whether or not any Abrahamic religion like Christianity can be made compatible is a further stretch.

The problem of religion being made compatible with James first appears to be a problem for him, since our experiences may relate to and intend more, especially if something like an objective reference is intended. In other words, people can have "an experience that

J. Edward Hackett

reaches beyond itself’ or when someone “feels his experience to be substitutional even while he has it.”⁴² Some of our knowledge may appear and then terminate in a sense of completion. If a student knows all there is to learn with reference to the rules of equivalence and rules of inference in Russell’s statement, and logic and I have yet to introduce one-place or two-place predicates, then the student may think he/she has learned all they can about this topic. Further gaps in our experience may also require referring back to previous content to supplement what new innovations are possible (e.g., in learning formal logic). Our experienced knowledge comes to us as conjunctive relations that add more content and therefore more possibility that what once appeared complete may be undone.

The desire for objective reference is the start of thematizing religious themes in James’s radical empiricism. “Objective reference...is an incident of the fact that so much of our experience comes as an insufficient and consists of process and transition.”⁴³ Our experience consists of fields and these fields do not possess definitive boundaries. Both the subjective-pole and the objective-pole are “fringed forever by a *more* that continuously develops, and that continuously supersedes them as life proceeds.”⁴⁴ Life is filled with both emerging and receding relations. “Life is in the transitions as much as it is in the terms connected.”⁴⁵ The transcendentalist, rationalist, or idealist may not like James’s conclusion that knowledge consists in terminating in external relations and that the quasi-ground of our knowledge comes in virtual cases. Unlike James, I may never have been to Harvard, but with maps, smartphone GPS applications, and my spatial reasoning, I can determine virtually where I am located in relation to Memorial Hall. This virtuality seems like removing an absolute ground that the transcendentalist might want to push between the varying changes of my ongoing experiences in which some introduction of the absolute attempts to solve. In this way, James will not concede to introducing God or some divine ground as a way to unify the continuous changing nature of experienced contents. “Why insist that knowing is a static relation out of time when it practically seems so much a function of our active life?”⁴⁶

Given that our active life takes place in this world, the setting of our active life and shared capacities to live that active life guarantee an intersubjective world to which we can all in some sense access through varying interpretations. James resists the charge of solipsism with this very common near-like Husserlian answer. “Why do I postulate your mind? Because I see your body acting in a certain way. Its gestures, facial movements, words, and conduct generally, are “expressive,” so I deem it actuated as my own is, by an inner life like mine.”⁴⁷ My own experience as thoroughly embodied, felt, and as directed into this world is an analogous projection to find your world similar if not identical as an embodied, felt, and directed being. James illustrates this point with tug of war. If you and I are pulling on the same rope and feel the resistance of each other in a game of tug of war, does it not make sense to regard the rope as similarly experienced by you and me? The rope is the same for me as it is for you in a certain sense, and yet if my side is winning, the other side is feeling impending loss and the momentum of their bodies being pulled through space. In that way, the same object experienced is not the same, but different and similar all at the same time. The important point is that the relations of that experience are co-experienced and emerge together as meaningful. If my side won, then you can immediately understand why, as we recall how our teams approached the game, how what we did with our bodies that differed from what your team did with yours. Solipsism is avoided by both the analogy of our conditions of existence, and the way the realm of common objects establishes a world of relations beyond our experience of them. “Practically, then, our minds meet in a world of objects which they share in common, which would still be there, if one or several of the minds were destroyed.”⁴⁸

“A World of Pure Experience” ends in what we might interpret as a universe of ongoing and pluralistic relations. There is both the sense and meaning of relations that pertain to human experiencers and a universe beyond experience. In fact, the argument by analogy of one’s own experience not only sets up an intersubjective experience that runs together and coalesces with others. The

J. Edward Hackett

argument from analogy of my own experience also establishes the limit to which God, too, is an experiencer. However conceived, God is limited and this analogous point indicates that radical empiricism as a metaphysics of pure experience establishes the limit of God to the concept and explains why the Divine is compatible with radical empiricism. God is made compatible with the type of experience radical empirical scaffolding provides. God would have to exist in the same universe of ongoing relations.

James provides two axes. The first axis is the limits that apply to God as a fellow experiencer. Let me first introduce the limiting conception. "If there be a God, he is no absolute all-experiencer, but simply the experiencer of widest actual conscious span."⁴⁹ In this way, God is an entity in relation to the cosmos in much the same way as I am. Moreover, God is not an infinite-knower. God is an onto-relational experiencer of possible and actual relations in wider scope than I could ever be. This is the first limit which radical empiricism offers.

The second axis involves how "A World of Pure Experience" ends. From the point of view of an onto-relational experiencer of conjunctive and disjunctive relations, where content comes to pass and fades away before a new point of selective interest commands the field of my awareness, "we at every moment can continue to believe in an existing *beyond*."⁵⁰ Given that the universe cannot protest our interpretative drafts of what we take this beyond to be, the *beyond* exists in a mixture of chaos and potential intelligibility. Eventually, James accepts a type of panpsychism given that the widest possible experiencer is that which could experience itself but also be intelligible in much the same way that when I look at the movements of another, I know there is an experiencer there. The beyond must be experiential in terms of how radical empiricism functions. "The beyond must, of course, always in our philosophy be itself of an experiential nature."⁵¹ The panpsychic thesis for James is a speculation made compatible with his metaphysics of pure experience. We can only experience content in the present immediacy of unfolding relations.

As James explains, the beyond exists at two different intersections, two points along the axis of my experience and the other axis of it experiencing itself.

The beyond can in any case exist simultaneously—for it can be experienced *to have existed* simultaneously—with the experience that practically postulates it by looking in its direction, or by turning or changing in the direction of which it is the goal. Pending that actuality of union, in virtuality of which the “truth,” even now, of the postulation consists, the beyond and its knower are entities split off from each other. The world is in so far forth a pluralism of which the unity is not fully experienced as yet. But, as fast as verifications come, trains of experience, once separate, run into one another; and that is why I said, earlier in my article, that the unity of the world is on the whole undergoing increase. The universe continually grows in quantity by new experiences that graft themselves upon the older mass; but these very new experiences often help the mass to a more consolidated form.⁵²

In the passage above, *the beyond* is that sense of more that attaches itself to a feeling of the totality. The totality appears as that which constantly exceeds us and for the finite experiencer, the continuous transition of experienced content comes and goes as either chaos or something more. The “more” is problematic given how many configurations and interpretations the beyond and the more have.

Nothing in the universe can give us a definitive argument against one interpretation of the beyond. Some content in those experiences seem directed to that same beyond that escapes conceptualization, and so faith replaces that gap between the unseen order of the religious impulse and what is actually there in the totality of relations. So James adopts a practical faith compatible with his radical empiricism, which attests to the fact that whatever our religious interpretation may be it must be consistent with both science and the immediacy of our present relations. The core of this practical faith is that perhaps our experiences may map onto whatever the Divine is as the widest possible experiencer. Our lack of unity may join the widest possible experiencer. Radical

J. Edward Hackett

empiricism cannot be divorced from whatever final arrangement James's philosophy of religion will take. It encompasses the faith that unity in the widest possible conception of experience lies at the heart of a universe responsive to human effort, since the beyond invites through its possible unity those very same efforts.

In a letter to François Pillon, in 1904, James states the components of his metaphysics of relations alongside the other commitments that make up this final arrangement.⁵³

My philosophy is what I call a radical empiricism, a pluralism, a "tychism," which represents order as being gradually won and always in the making. It is theistic, but not essentially so. It rejects all doctrines of the Absolute. It is finitist; but it does attribute to the question of the Infinite the great methodological importance which you and Renouvier attribute to it. I fear that you may find my system too bottomless and romantic. I am sure that, be it in the end judged true or false, it is essential to the evolution of clearness in philosophic thought that someone should defend a pluralistic empiricism radically.⁵⁴

In the following letter, his metaphysics places everything into his final arrangement. Radical empiricism takes conjunctive and disjunctive relations at face value. The ontological consequence is that only relations manifest in experience, and that our experience is an interchangeable term with reality in the sense that both reality and experience are relational and in the process of being made in the present of both what is real and experienced in the relations together. The terms of a relation and the relation itself fill out and move in the immediate flux of life. Next, James borrows the term "tychism" from Peirce. The chance-filled universe of the tychistic worldview is made possible because of the manner in which relations come together for a time, even making sense in our experience, and then receding from view within the ever-present stream of consciousness and the objects it regularly intends in those relations.

In addition to the previous elements, the Pillon letter also says there are religiously-laden themes made compatible with the final arrangement that become the focus of James's later years (1904-

1910). Notice that James rejects all Absolutes we find typical in monism. Instead, the Divine is finitistic. A finitistic God or Divine reality is not one that is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. Instead, a finitistic God or Divine reality is finite in its capacities. James does not say here just how finite God is, and his conception of the Divine cannot be teased apart unless I first ask what the metaphysical status of relations are. The Divine, for James, is an experienter, and while James slides towards a panpsychism regarding the Divine, James reaches these conclusions only because his conception of the Divine is made compatible with both scientific findings about reality and our experience of it. James's philosophy is theistic, "but not essentially so" as we find in rationalism or in idealistic monisms. In other words, James does not think that his conception of the Divine is necessarily true for all people, in how his theoretical construction of it must accord with science and our experience of reality being made in our continual experience of the cosmos. It is one interpretation and so is consistent with his consequent pluralism.

4. Unthematized Chaos

Charlene Haddock Seigfried's dissertation of 1973 and later 1978 monograph, *Chaos and Context*, stand next to both John Wild and John McDermott as the most important study of James's radical empiricism in the 20th century. In that work, I wish to take up, however briefly, a theme that Seigfried makes explicit. As radical empiricism is situated in rejecting rationalism (a theme already covered in previous chapters) and British empiricism's tendency to sever atomic units of sensation from the overall relationality (the tissue of experience), Seigfried identifies the theme of chaos. The idea of chaos is left unthematized in radical empiricism. To repeat James's words, "Taken as it does appear, our universe is to a large extent chaotic. No one single type of connection runs through all the experiences that compose it."⁵⁵ The world as a chaos of sensations is a legacy articulated in David Hume, even the self as a "bundle of impressions" is the residuum of the larger chaotic world delivered through the senses. The ontological status of both conjunctive

J. Edward Hackett

relations and disjunctive relations pertain to my existence and the sphere of my experience. And yet, there is a world independent of my relations that still stands in relation to any potential experiencer. These relations are as in process and in flux as my potential experience of them.

The universe exhibits relations that do not pertain to me. As an experiencer, I do not emphasize them nor do I experience them meaningfully even though relations of movement and position pertain to some hypothetical asteroid rotating and moving through another solar system in a galaxy adjacent to our own. Such an asteroid probably exists even as I write these words and you are reading them.⁵⁶ This hypothetical asteroid stands in relation to all orbital mechanics surrounding it independently of being known by any human being at this time. Seigfried call this a “multiverse of chaos.”⁵⁷ James allows for the actual and potential relations to both pertain to me or another experiencer while also concerning me and not me. What might slip out of such actual and potential relations is the ontological status of relations operating beyond any experiencer. This multiverse of chaos is, then, filled with both continuities as they pertain to my experience and relations *extra mente*. These relations *extra mente* are discontinuous with my experience, but perhaps continuous with someone else’s experience. The conclusion here is that there are still experiences and relations that compose the universe beyond me.

What’s significant for James is that both rationalism and empiricism interpret perceptual acts with the sharp division of mind and world, which does not yield a relational, processive, or transactional account blending and folding mind and world into each other. Instead, both the rationalist and the empiricist accept the mind as a passive recorder, not a dynamic and unfolding relational field of attention and activity. James replaces this passive recorder interpretation with his radical empiricism, an onto-relational interpretation about pure experience and the sorting feature of selective interest co-operate *a tergo*. According to James, there is a selective agency whereby the experiencer directs their attention, and the sphere of that attention and object generate their own context in

which relations manifest.

At this point, many make a mistake. With their attention to some interest selected by their own agency, they encounter some set of relations and objects of those relations I'll call "relata." These relations and relata seem immutably given in their experience while also forgetting about the ongoingness of the relations and relata to which the chaos of the universe yields on a whole. The perceptual given is never static, even if the perceptual acts find fulfillment again and again. No matter how often I reach for the same cup, I know that the backside, unexhibited to my direct perceptual act, is nonetheless fulfilled in my anticipations of the same cup. I cannot abstract the ontological status of cup from the dynamism of these relations (its atomic structure, the bodily givenness on a whole, or that it is experienced directly in temporality) any more than I can foreseeably sever my own arm. These relations anticipate fulfillment in my experience, so from this basis, I can project and entertain relations and relata independently of any human experiencer. For this reason, James could be separated from phenomenologists following Husserl. Moreover, whether or not the universe is so ordered in its apparent chaos is not up for grabs ontologically speaking. In Seigfried's words, "We react to this chaos by selecting items or relations subjectively interesting to us and remodeling the order of our experience."⁵⁸ James, like Dewey, embraces a type of processive naturalism in which the processes of my understanding break down and, upon recognition of this fact, the moment of my reconstruction of the meaning of interpretation is in reaction to a universe that flows indifferently in time alongside me. I will meaning-making in response to this multiverse of chaos. What Seigfried highlights is what remains forever implicit in James (and what one might also include from Sartre and Beauvoir's existentialist accounts). Implicit in James is the thinking of an artist who makes sense of a world that he/she responds to and directly effects my making sense of it. The artist metaphor guides our thinking of meaning-making for what is given and can be controlled in our experience. Beyond our experience exists an undifferentiated chaos ignored by Husserlians and any idealism too confident about

J. Edward Hackett

how relations function and obtain within their episodic chaos and organization.

In more plain language, James realized that the strength of his position depends upon denying the extremes of how one might prioritize one relation, a set of relations, or one side of a relation over others. Philosophers since Plato have universalized and instantiated aspects of the relational dyad of pure experience. Plato plays and over-emphasizes the unchanging permanent perfection of the Forms at the expense of the various particulars those universal ideas helped to explain. By contrast, the artistic metaphor is in the metaphor of a mosaic in which other relations stand next to mine, some interacting, others terminating with no interaction, and, compositionally, those relations both permeate each other while others do not. Relations operate independently of any single experiencer, so why not assume nature is filled with relations manifesting independently of me as they manifest in my experience of nature?

As we consider these mosaics of experiences, some connected and others not, James explains how a set of them may have developed into more orderly interpretations that deny the lack of unity of continuous and discontinuous relations. What appears orderly in both an inner and outer sense stems from prioritizing a quality of experience as if disclosed in a prioritized sliver, such that people may continually enter into that same pattern that induces the same relation. For this reason, our beliefs and ideas are inextricably bound to practical consequences.⁵⁹ For instance, the role of ritual in religion is to put experiencers back into re-feeling the same content, whether it be meditation in Soto Zen or rising out of the pew to take communion at Catholic mass. In such experiences, the aesthetic, moral, and emotional serve as intermediaries when these relations guide us. Concretely speaking, in bowing in supplication and prayer in the pew, I then rise as the Eucharistic ministers have positioned themselves to administer the host. In rising from prayer, I am ending that submission to now walk reverently to take in Christ's body so that I may renew my commitment to the communal body of Christ. The emotional experience of preparing myself leads into sustaining

reverence to participate in the ritual. In Soto Zen, the perception of the gong initiates my practice of *zazen* (sitting meditation). The gong's sound marks a break. I turn to face the wall. I sit and count "one" in my in-breath and exhale "two" in my out-breath. I do this until "ten," and anytime my awareness deviates, I return to counting breaths from one to ten. When the gong rings again, I rise with a prepared mind. Our Roshi invites us to sit in a circle around her for *dokusan* (a type of Zen sermon where teachings are discussed and lectured). These experiences are punctuated by inner and outer movements, but these inner and outer movements are still enjoined at the same time to both sides of the dyadic relation with world.

In these experiences, the affective, moral, and aesthetic may be assigned subjective and objective priority. And yet we must consider that even these relations are always double-barreled. In describing one side with priority, the other side does not vanish, even though James's attention to one side makes people think he is only concerned with the subjective marks of an idea. From the fact that relations arise within our shared human experience and the yet undifferentiated relations chaotically manifest independent of mine, yours, or human perspective altogether, the world is a pluralism of relations. In James's own words,

the whole system of experiences as they are immediately given presents itself as a quasi-chaos through which one can pass out of an initial term in many directions and yet end in the same terminus, moving from next to next by a great many possible paths.⁶⁰

One could posit, for instance, that the paths leading to liberation in Buddhist teaching are many, regardless if someone is part of the Soto Zen tradition or if someone has a more Theravadan orientation to religious life. The many paths, if they lead to the same qualitative function in experience, then the order found in chaos responds to the interpretive paths that are possible while also understanding the many ways which some paths may illustrate similar outcomes and where other interpretive possibilities are completely different. The fact is the universe can be experienced in so many ways and each

J. Edward Hackett

set of relations interpreted differently. This constitutes a mosaic, a religious multiverse, in which the irreducible parts of relational experience stand on their own alongside other equally powerful interpretive paths. Let a thousand lotuses bloom, as the Buddhists say.

Innumerable relations are actual and potential—some unified, others not. James and any Jamesian may wish that some perspective may be capable of uniting the pluralistic character of the world and our experiences of it. Again, I point to the practical faith exhibited by James that reality is increasing in unity. Ultimately, the need to philosophize arises out of a Jamesian optimism while simultaneously acknowledging our shared and still current limitation in supplying an answer to the unity of relations of the chaotic multiverse. The impetus to philosophize and indeed to act within this world is animated by just how much unity a theoretical system conceives and the simultaneous evasion of that overwhelmingly complex system of relations carrying on independently of my experience of them. For James, any theoretical construction is formed out of those relations in experience and any adequate theoretical system is a tentative hypothesis, always revisable and tested by the consequences it gives rise to in all other facets of experience.

One could well object that a quasi-chaos is “a patent absurdity.” Someone likely to assert this absurdity might force upon James a choice between chaos or order. Such an objection would construe both as contradictories as to imply if chaos or order are true, then the other opposing term must be false. This objection, Seigfried informs us, would be “to fall into vicious intellectualism.”⁶¹ The objection relies on a baseless assumption that reality is wholly rational and logical, not to mention that “experience is far more complex and various than a single-edged logical analysis can exhibit.”⁶² Experience is beset with unrolling relations that come almost as if out of chaos only to find order when we see to classify that raw immediacy into the threads, paths, and connections we make in the contexts within which we experience them.

For James, experience is temporal, taking place in and unrolling in time. It is characterized by transition from one part of experience to the next. “The only function that one experience can perform is to lead into another experience.”⁶³ The movement of our experience is, as we’ve read, given in our immediacy in confluence of chaotic relations. Thus, our experience is a dynamic flow of movement that finds enough order to regard it intelligibly while also there is an awareness of that which escapes intelligibility. In this fluid movement of relations, then, are the many salient parts of experience and context we inhabit even before experiencing similar relations and similar parts. As James put it, “so much of our experience comes as an insufficient and consists of process and transition.” However, James continues, “Our field of experience have no more definite boundaries than have our fields of view. Both are fringed forever by a *more* that continuously develops and that continuously supersedes them as life proceeds.”⁶⁴ The *more* is the source of this faith in the increase in unity, but the movement always breaks down. As terms, sensations, and the relations that contain them pass over us and terminate in connection to percepts, James’s italicized *more* and the fringe exemplify a movement of an attenuated process pansychism moves and animates the background of his *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. Within the continuous unfolding of relations, there is this pull between the One and the Many. In my particular experience of an undifferentiated that or what, “full of both oneness and of manyness, but in respects that don’t appear; changing throughout, yet so confusedly that its phases interpenetrate and no points, either of distinction or of identity, can be caught.” Both oneness and manyness interpenetrate the complex unfolding of relations. Oneness and manyness, while present, cannot be caught. In other words, the movement of the One and the Many reflects the metaphysical status of relations and the nascent panpsychism we find when reading James’s *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. I will take this up in the next chapter.

J. Edward Hackett

5. THE ONE AND THE MANY QUESTION OF REALITY AND RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY

What Seigfried leaves unthematized in the quasi-chaos of experience is the oscillation and process of finding order and the lapse of order's recession to the immediately given quasi-chaos of *more* relations. This *more* that goes unaddressed in the *Essays in Radical Empiricism* is a union of both tychism, theism, and the pluralism that James hints at as a possible final arrangement in the Pillon letter. Independently of this fact, James claims that change and identity, manyness and oneness cannot be caught in experience, but only experienced. Once they are caught in any proposed conceptualization the conceptualization is simply an abstraction of the ongoingness of the relations we experience. In that moment, the concept lets the original slip away and pales in comparison to the experience undergone in that flux.

Next, John McDermott in his editorial selection of *The Writings of William James* also puts the two chapters "The One and the Many" and "The One and the Many—Values and Defects" from *Some Problems of Metaphysics* under the subject heading of Radical Empiricism. As such, it is my thesis in this next section that a movement between a primal One and the finitude of our experience of those relations as the Many constitute the religious impetus to which James's notion of Divinity finds expression. Let us now move to characterize the later problem of reality and see how it illuminates the metaphysical status of relations. A corollary insight of my thesis is that the only metaphysically real thing for James are our relations, their terms, and their movement within temporality in the One and the Many.

In the beginning, James's investigation is after what characterizes the whole of reality given that our finite experience is part of the whole of reality. By the whole of reality, I mean what James calls "the full amount, of reality...given only in the perceptual flux." While "the flux is continuous from next to next, non-adjacent portions of it are separated by parts that intervene, and such separation seems in a variety of cases to work a positive disconnection."⁶⁵ The non-adjacent portions run together and often

change, folding sometimes into each other and sometimes transitioning to other relations entirely disconnected from what one's attention selected just prior to the transition. In other words, our experience of reality consists of both conjunctive and disjunctive relations. There is a motion of coming together and a pulling apart of our experience, a movement of the unfurling stream of consciousness that reaches back as far as his *Principles of Psychology*, and that which becomes the problem of relations in radical empiricism, which is then answered by the problem of the One and the Many. The question runs deep. The problem of the One and the Many is "the most pregnant of all the dilemmas of philosophy, although it is only in our time that it has been articulated distinctly."⁶⁶ What is the solution to the problem of the One and the Many?

True to Jamesian form, let's take a look at how James describes the situation. Either the problem of the flux and the movement of relations are handled "piecemeal or distributively," which means that James looks "at the entire flux as if were their sum or collection" in an empirical manner, or regard "that the whole is fundamental, that the parts derive from it and all belong with one another."⁶⁷ The tension of this problem is, then, the tensions between empiricism and rationalism that inaugurate our entrance into the problem of One and the Many. The rationalist is part of that tendency which claims that the separations between experience are all but illusory. Instead of being a sum of distributed parts empirically, the universe is all One, not Many. Or is reality truly Many, filled with irreducible parts that aim at explaining reality as if it were One, but our experience can neither access nor confirm? If so, then there is a limit to the claims of ultimacy even behind our religious and theological speculation, no matter how much we want a rationalist picture to be true.

The methodological posits of these two tendencies track two solutions. On the rationalist side, James emphasizes monism. For James, "monism thus holds the oneness to be the more vital and essential element" in which "the entire cosmos must be a consolidated unit, within which each member is determined by the

J. Edward Hackett

whole to be just that, and from which the slightest incipency of independence is ruled out.”⁶⁸ In various monisms, the relations of experience are reducible to some ontologically basic reality, though James definitely thinks that all forms of monism “vague and mystical” to the point that the principle of unity is unclear. James lists the various forms of monism as mystical monism, monism of substance, and idealistic monism (what he will call absolute idealism in *Some Problems in Philosophy*).

Mystical monism is the name of a type of monism that “revels in formulas that defy understanding, but it accredits itself by appealing to states of illumination not vouchsafed to common men.”⁶⁹ James uses the examples of Plotinus’s One and the philosophical/religious system of Hinduism. Mystical experiences are a real, genuine possibility for James, but the fact that they are experienced is not itself an argument for what Hindu thinkers or Plotinian Platonists take them to be. First and foremost, these experiences are illuminations of the affective relationality common to all religious experience already established in the last chapter and therefore compatible with radical empiricism. Moreover, “the regular mystical way of attaining the vision of the One is by ascetic training, fundamentally the same in religious systems.”⁷⁰ This “type of ineffable Oneness is not strictly philosophical.” By contrast, “philosophy is essentially talkative and explicit, so I must pass [mystical monism] by.”⁷¹ In other words, given that mystical monism relies on states of ineffability that cannot be put into words, mystical monism, while felt, is not given to the same degree of articulation that philosophical analysis requires, even for James. One might argue that this leads James away from the type of mysticism he described in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In that text, mysticism has a more intelligible and more content-driven quasi-cognitive nature that James does not see operative in either Plotinus or the Hindu philosophical systems in *Some Problems of Philosophy*. Contrary to James, Hinduism and the longstanding interpretation of the Vedic scriptures are vast, and his dismissal, however uncritical, should not dissuade the reader from examining the vast array of Hindu literature and commentary.

James transitions to the theme of substance-based metaphysics. These are examples of what James calls *monism of substance*. For him, the conception of substance is the concept that means “any being that exists per se, so that it needs no further subject in which to inhere.”⁷² Stemming from the Greek tradition onward and well into the Middle Ages as a subsequent influence of the Hellenization of Christian thought, substance metaphysics are inextricably linked to a view of the universe that ignores the novelty of becoming and the processes of growth. If something exhibits substance, as James continues, then the substance in question is identified “with ‘the principle individuality’ in things, and with their essence.”⁷³ An entity, like God, is a substance existing both for itself and in itself. As the creator, God exists as the ultimate originator of what gets made with substance. James only regards the substance view as a partial unifier. Substance-based metaphysical accounts again reify some concepts and transform each into an essence without so much as a view of the relations that obtain between me and the objects concepts are used to explain nor the conceptualization of relations that obtain independently of me.

James surveys Spinoza, Locke, and Berkeley. Spinoza thought of substance as infinite and the causally necessary God to the extent that substance becomes identified with a deified nature. Locke thought personal identity remained the same, so the self-same identity recalled through the psychological continuity of memory was due to individual substance. And yet, Locke called substance “I know not what.” Even in Berkeley’s claim of *esse est percipi* material substance becomes known as sensations and their groupings. Berkeley’s grand unification of spirit of ideas is still, I think, a monism of substance. In each, he identifies what functions as substance is a concern about the role the idea of substance plays in the respective thought-systems of philosophy. Put more forcefully, “What difference in practical experience is it supposed to make that we have each a personal substantial principle?”⁷⁴

Once James answers the question the role of substance plays in our experience, James posits that the term “substance” merely conveys those groupings of sensations which belong together.

J. Edward Hackett

Substance provides a type of grouping function of perceived-to-exist discrete things in the universe. “The fact that certain perceptual experiences [including optical and tactile] do seem to *belong together* is thus all that the word “substance” means.”⁷⁵ In other words, substance transforms pieces of the ongoing relationality of experience itself and cements those relations as always existing. Substance ensures eternal permanence of perceived objects and transforms bits of relations from the chaotic multiverse and flux of life into something enduring and permanent; this is the mistake of the block universe from his *A Pluralistic Universe*. In this way, the origin of conception is to never behold the inwardness of our ideas as if those are real, but to see ideas as guiding the formation of ongoing relations from us into the world. Thus, Plato’s Cave should be inverted according to any empiricism. Only by virtue of what James cites favorably in Hume can we see that the idea of substance is only a collection of simple ideas united in the imagination. We imagine substance *qua* experienced snippets to be something *more* grand than what actually exists with the historical fiction of substance.

At this point, however, we should recall in James the freedom to imagine this *more* as something that cannot be blocked by radical empiricism. Radical empiricism is an openness to the possibility of growth of relations that become experienced and if someone were to will themselves to believe in a grand uniting conception of substance or Divinity, and if it incorporates the latest findings of nature from science and the temporal becoming of phenomena, then such a conception is coherent. What is left out of possibility is the forever-permanence of such an idea of Divinity. Classical theism is cut asunder as if radical empiricism were a lightsaber from Star Wars. In other words, classical theism, in positing a God beyond space and time, is incoherent. Since every relation takes place in time and space, then God to be known as the relation between any person and the openness of what is felt but not perceived directly can only be itself given in time and space. God could only be a being in space and time in those relations, so if there is such a being, we must amend our conception of it.

Still, one might ask James if there is any room for the type of unifying such terms like “substance” can enact without the foolishness of what Emerson called “the dry bones of the past”? As he says, there are verifiable and specific connections made in experience and maybe there is a role for the “the world’s oneness.” A different conception of God or the Divine may well exist. However, such an inquiry will not abandon sustaining an eye and view to ongoing relations and such an inquiry will make those connections “amongst the parts of the experiential flux.”⁷⁶ In other words, the answer will be consistent with an eye to James’s radical empiricism that embraces experiential flux, and the flux consists of relations that come together and recede. These two conditions give rise to our experience of the Divine.

James puts his worry thusly, “Suppose there is a oneness in things, what might it be known-as? What differences to you and me will it make?”⁷⁷ In asking this question, James then ends the first of his two chapters on the problem of the Many and the One by showing that the innumerable modes of union amongst the parts of experience lead to varying outcomes. Each type of union is also contextually bound to practice.

James first explores the many ways these innumerable modes of union operate on larger and smaller scales. Some modes of union are described in physics and classical mechanics, and yet not everything is reduced down to mechanics, as some parts of the universe can move without other parts moving them. In this way, James would have been open to particle physics. Most parts of the universe are affected by gravitation. Of these, some may be organized chemically while other parts may be united in terms of thermic, optical, or electrical properties. “These connections are specifications of what we mean by the word oneness...it is clear by the same logic we ought to call it ‘many’ so far as its parts are disconnected in these same ways.”⁷⁸ James’s attention to the reality of ongoing relations in experience preserves the elemental movement these ideas possess in experience. No perspective can be taken about them without forgetting that the contextual differences and practices give rise to our attending to them in experience. In one

J. Edward Hackett

light, we can look at how an idea is united under a general universal idea insofar as it aids and guides our interaction with it instrumentally. In another light, when we see just how a particular thing can be regarded universally as having chemical properties, the same thing may not have electrical properties. In this way, an idea brings things together and when viewed alongside other experiences, the particular thing is disjointed from them too. An idea can unite many particulars and in other ways the particular breaks apart in experience precisely because all of these ideas about properties are relational through and through. Let me explain.

Too many philosophical systems ignore the flux and movement and how our philosophical vocabularies are elemental. In being elemental, our metaphysical vocabularies are tentative functional descriptions of a dynamic and unfolding and relational world. Properties only activate against the backdrop of other relations. For instance, the land mass of an island expands insofar as lava flows into a body of water to cool it. The lava flows only because the conditions exist for that magma to rise to the surface. In this movement, land forms from solidified rock. “There is thus neither absolute oneness nor absolute manyness from the physical point of view, but a mixture of well-defined modes of both.”⁷⁹ A relational ontology is therefore more analogous and friendly to an ontology of mixtures than thinking of reality as hierarchical. Thus, how land masses form may be extrapolated from geology, but not without combining the various modes of physics, chemistry, and biology to explain how landmasses form and become inhabitable. The more complicated our scientific knowledge, the more relational modes our theories can incorporate into them. “[The] world is full of partial purposes, partial stories. That they all form chapters of one supreme purpose and inclusive story is the monistic conjecture.”⁸⁰

James does not simply just mean scientific knowledge. In fact, his relational ontology of becoming relations is for all domains of knowledge, including how we conceive of ourselves and by extension the Divine. Consider when he writes,

The same thing can belong to many systems, as when a man is connected with other objects by heat, by gravitation, by love, and by knowledge. From the point of view of partial systems, the world hangs together from next to next in a variety of ways, so that when you are off of one thing you can always be on to something else, without ever dropping out of your world.⁸¹

In this passage, a particular thing, whatever it be, can belong to many partial systems all at once. These systems are all different domains of knowledge, and they consist of varying unfolding relations brought under varying degrees of unity. These systems are all interpretations of one particular thing. James just happens to select human beings in this example, and human beings can occupy different positions. Human beings can be defined by our thermal status, such as when a designer attempts to design a mummy sleeping bag for alpine climbers to use at base camp. Human beings can be defined by the effects gravitation has on our bodies. Human beings can be defined practically by their loving relationships or lack thereof, and human beings can be defined solely by their epistemic agency. We can move in our mind from seeking out the unfolding relations of love and kin and then question our epistemic powers in the next moment. The stunning thing for James (and maybe Wilfrid Sellars who will privilege the expression the world “hanging together”) is that there are relations between human subjectivity and the world and varying phenomena beyond our experience all at the same time. James’s hanging together expression is the sublime fact that there are relations and they can be experienced. The same by analogy would hold for God.

One will notice that James does not make an argument by analogy to God. Instead, James chooses a different route when talking of teleological and aesthetic union as the last type outlined in this chapter. James chooses to talk about God and the many problems classical theism and idealistic monism possess from the pragmatic point of view. In this discussion, I should admit that James is painting with broad strokes and a more charitable nuanced reading should take place. In the next section, I will offer a more nuanced reading of one version of idealistic monism.

6. F. H. BRADLEY'S CHALLENGES TO THE PROCESSIVE NATURALISM OF JAMES'S RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY

So far I have presented an interpretation of James unrivaled by disagreement. As I bring this essay to a close, I will take some time to explain Bradley's objections to a relational ontology and situate those objections with respect to Bradley's third chapter on relation and qualition in *Appearance and Reality* (1893) and Timothy Sprigge's interpretation of Bradley's arguments. In keeping with James's *A Pluralistic Universe*, "My next duty, accordingly, must be to rescue radical empiricism from Mr. Bradley."⁸² The purpose in doing so is to present these arguments as a counter to my interpretation of James.⁸³ In doing so, I will point out how aspects of my interpretation and James stand on their own when under direct assault from what I take to be the most famous/infamous objection to relational ontology ever formulated in Anglophone analytic philosophy.

Sprigge has a clearer presentation of the four propositions Bradley attempts to argue. For Bradley, relations are unreal, and he attempts to establish this by outlining the following propositions:

- (1) Qualities without relations are impossible
- (2) Qualities with relations are impossible
- (3) Relations without qualities are impossible
- (4) Relations with qualities are impossible.⁸⁴

While it appears that that (2) and (4) are the same, (2) is actually a proposition articulated from the perspective of qualities whereas (4) is from the view of relations. Following this perspective, Sprigge claims, "Thus neither relations and qualities (or objects) can be real as they are required on this scheme."⁸⁵ Unlike (2) and (4), Bradley is a bit ambiguous about (1) and (3). Sprigge asks about this ambiguity. Do (1) and (3) claim "A) that qualities or (relations) cannot exist without relations (or qualities) or B) that one cannot form a conception of the one without the other?"⁸⁶ Likewise, as a contradiction, neither (1) and (3) can be true together and the same holds for (2) and (4).

As we start into Bradley, the first assumption is clear. “The arrangement of given facts into relations and qualities may be necessary in practice, but it is theoretically unintelligible.”⁸⁷ Bradley divorces facts from how they are experienced on the third sentence, even if acknowledging that it’s “necessary in practice.” The necessity in practice has no bearing on theoretical intelligibility and so we start already in creative tension about methodologies with respect to James. Bradley associates this necessity in practice as taking the surface of our experience in terms of mere appearance. Appearance is a substitute for the deep metaphysical truth about reality, and his arguments state that we need not conflate what James might call a percept with reality. By contrast, relations occur in the appearing level of experience that both classical pragmatism and phenomenology highlight. Both focus on the irreducible content that presents itself as “the really real” (and that I take as a datum to begin philosophizing). Given the primacy of theoretical efforts, Bradley sets his task as nothing other than “The object of this chapter is to show that the very essence of these ideas is infected and contradicts itself...Relation presupposes quality and quality relation. Each can be something neither together with nor apart from, the other, and the vicious circle in which they turn is not the truth about reality.”⁸⁸

The first argument emphasizes that *qualities without relations are impossible*. In claiming that proposition, Bradley means, “Whenever you take them [qualities] so, [qualities] are made so, and continue so, by an operation which itself implies relation.”⁸⁹ Immediately, one will notice that Bradley doesn’t exactly define relation from quality, though this first argument does give us a hint that a quality is an aspect or content of the relation whereas relation is somewhat close to how I have intended the term in James. To say that A is related to B, the relation might be one of identity or difference. A relation has terms A and B and describes the form of a particular relation between the terms. For Bradley, quality is the name of the content or an aspect of a person P’s experience of either A or B or a description of A and B conceptualized apart from us. So when Bradley says, “To find qualities without relations is surely impossible,” that’s a truism that James’s radical empiricism would

J. Edward Hackett

accept. Ashley, my wife, is a meter to the right of me. The terms of this relation are between us and the quality of spatial length of one meter and being to the right of me are true for me at this moment at Tulane's Howard Tilton Library in New Orleans. Therefore (1) seems to be that one cannot identify any quality without using relations to other qualities as part of the identifying act. If you were forced to identify one quality, "being to the right of me," then Bradley thinks that you are forced to ask how that quality is related to other qualities. So you must understand the quality of bodily orientation in space to understand that Ashley is to the right of me and you may also have to understand that to be on the right of me is also not to be on the left side of me. In other words, Bradley understands that "anything counts as a quality in this connection" and he finds that extremely problematic.⁹⁰ Sprigge also contends that "Bradley's discussion is so concise and so short in illustration, that it is not at all easy to pinpoint just exactly what in more concrete terms he is getting at."⁹¹ A quality, it seems, cannot be known in isolation from other qualities. It would make no sense to mention being on the right of me and one meter distance tomorrow where both Ashley and I work, rather than being together at a library on a Sunday. Such a relation and quality obtain only right now at the time of writing this at the library. Bradley says that such "a relation has existence *only for us*, and as a way of our getting to know."⁹² The relations will not exist in the actual world beyond what they mean for us in the present experience. So whereas James or Dewey would take the present experience as the starting place for inquiry, Bradley does not. Let me explain.

To say that this relation and quality come together always is to conceptualize the fact that "Ashley, my wife, is a meter to the right of me" is true because of differences in the actual world, but Bradley thinks in order to conceptualize the proposition based on differences means that there must be a separation of the relation from the process of experience. The mental powers of abstraction must be enacted. "The qualities, as distinct, are always made so by an action which is admitted to imply relation."⁹³ The tension for Bradley seems to be that the quality so described must be conceptualized

apart from the relation experienced as “we are able to distinguish them and to consider them by themselves.” And yet they always run together with other qualities.⁹⁴ In so doing, Bradley thinks this tension of separability demands to understand them but our inability to separate them from other qualities generates their impossibility. Let us move onto (2).

Bradley’s second proposition is: *Qualities with relations are impossible*. In order to understand this proposition, Sprigge asks us to consider the number 7 with two aspects. First, it is an object in its own right. It possesses its own character that determines its relation to other numbers and by which 7 has in virtue of relations. Sprigge divides this example up between 7A and 7B, respectively. 7A consists of 7 in its separate being and 7B consists of 7 as filling the numeric slot between other numbers. According to that distinction, Bradley would argue that this “implies that each of 7A and 7B has two aspects, that which sets in relation to the other and that which results from its being so related.”⁹⁵ A number like 7 has the quality it has by two aspects. First, there’s the aspect that is determined by being in relation and the aspect that results from being so related. Bradley seems to think this problem of breaking down into two aspects generates an infinite regress objection. Let me explain.

Consider that 7A is an entity in its own right, but it also has this separate status in “being so related” to the 7B sense. At the same time, 7A “must be something qua being thus related to 7B and the rest of the system to which they belong.”⁹⁶ Once this mutuality is entertained with respect to 7A and 7B, “the same must be granted of each of the aspects into which each of them divides if they are related to each other.”⁹⁷ Hence, the infinite regress is reached. “Thus, the very idea of 7 being related to other numbers is incoherent, since it requires an endless regress to be completed.”⁹⁸ Unless all relations hold, none of the terms in those relations will stand in relation to any other term. Since relations cannot hold in relation to each other, it all collapses.

Alongside Sprigge, this argument fails to draw an important distinction between *real relations* and *ideal relations*. Sprigge writes, “if the argument is to show that relations are unreal in

J. Edward Hackett

general, it must apply to real relations as well as ideal ones.” Bradley’s failure to consider this distinction means, according to Sprigge, that

thus, even if one allows that the way in which one color contrasts with another is both determined by and determines the character of each, which therefore divides into two aspects, the determining and the determined, it does not follow that there is any such regress in the offing, when a relation like juxtaposition of the different colors on a surface or in a visual field is in question.⁹⁹

In other words, this passage suggests a breakdown. It is the breakdown of the determining and determined, and it might not hold for color perception in the same way that it might hold for the ideal relations as in Sprigge’s mathematical example of the number 7. For the Jamesian, relations are only real insofar as they are experienced as something. In art, color is sometimes shades or a difference of value situated against other differences between other colors. When one learns to draw with pencil or charcoal, the exerted pressure on the medium creates different juxtapositions of shade. Does the breakdown happen here? And if Bradley failed to show that his argument presupposes that real relations are assumed to behave as ideal relations (like mathematics), then Bradley is presupposing too much in tension with lived experience.

To sum up the second argument, let’s stipulate the following points in list form.

- (1) Qualities in relation depend upon possessing two aspects.
- (2A) The first aspect grounds and makes possible the entire relation; and
- (2B) The second aspect is that which becomes out of the first.
- (3) The regress happens because both 2A and 2B must be in relation to each other which itself must assume aspects of grounding and becoming themselves that generates the infinite regress.
- (4) Such a regress must be completed for any quality to be in relation to another.

In turning now to the third argument, let's remind the reader of what that proposition stated: *Relations without qualities are impossible*. The point is that sheer presence of relations requires terms and their qualities to be related and therefore present in that relation. "The toaster is *to the right of* the microwave" could not be stated without the toaster being *to the right of* the microwave.

If we were to extricate this third argument, then James would agree. Relations consist of terms or qualities embedded within contexts. What's clear is that this third thesis was never to be separated apart from the fourth thesis: *Relations with qualities are impossible*. The strategy is that relations cannot be conceived (let alone experienced) without qualities, but in being so connected, relations are incoherent. Both the third and fourth propositions cannot be true at the same time, and if taken together, they can be interpreted as an attempt to employ a *reductio ad absurdum* strategy. Bradley also anticipates this *ad absurdum* by anticipating the togetherness of the third and fourth propositions. As he says, "[Relations] are nothing intelligible, either with or without their qualities."¹⁰⁰ In this way, both the third and fourth are a form of skepticism, and they are crafted by Bradley to work in tandem with each other. For this reason, I am now transitioning to the fourth proposition. Before our analysis gets started, this fourth argument is, as Sprigge reminds us, Bradley's "most famous argument about relations is often taken out of context as though it were all he had to say on the matter."¹⁰¹

Consider the earlier example. "The toaster is *to the right of* the microwave." In this proposition, it's not enough that the toaster *to the right of* the microwave exist and these two terms and the property *to the right of* are in relation. Instead, these terms and property must be connected in a deeper way (or at least that's the intuition). The microwave and toaster left to their own terms are a superficial connection, and they seem to exist as separable as three things. Sprigge suggests that we posit "fresh relations" and "clearly the same question will arise once more as to how these relations are linked to the terms specified." In asking this question, however, we must ask, along with Sprigge, if Bradley reifies relations and treats

J. Edward Hackett

them as things?¹⁰² A more generous interpretation might think that Bradley is offering a forked path. If you are not turning relations into things, then you should see two options as a forked path. First, maybe relations are part of the character of the terms taken, or, second, one might consider relations part of the character of the terms taken as making up the whole together.

The first fork cleaves apart qualities from each other. The strategy urges us to see how nonsensical forcing their separation is. If the terms or qualities are separated, then they have no real bearing upon each other in relations. The question seems to be: What work are relations truly doing?

The second fork goes in the opposite direction. Rather than pushing incoherence on the theme of separation, the next theme is fusion of the terms into an indissoluble wholeness. If the characters of the terms merge together, then there are “no longer distinct things between relations which there can be relations.”¹⁰³

Metaphysics after James and Dewey leaves us with the question: How does the world hang together? This hanging together is neither an indissoluble whole or the forced separation of relations and related terms and qualities. Pragmatism posits that we live in the middle of such extremes that often define philosophical debate. There may be times wherein we reconcile ourselves to an interpretation of relations that might favor a provisional unity. Much of later James, though still critical of idealistic monism in Bradley, softens to some versions of idealism. What’s more, James understands why someone might endorse the separateness of terms. One could easily be a materialist and see objects as ultimately separate and apart from each other just as much as one could be an idealist and emphasize connection. James understands these motivations and the fact that there is clearly no one final interpretation of the universe that can settle the issue. “The world stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hands.”¹⁰⁴ Without that access to reality that could privilege one philosophical insight about reality over another, James’s pluralism can be laid at the feet of someone like Bradley who thinks that these knockdown arguments function to settle a metaphysical issue for all

time. In this Bradleyian way of thinking, relations are not coherent or have meaning on their own terms.

Bradley is strongly holistic. The whole pervades the parts. As the whole pervades the parts, it seems that the whole constitutes the meaning of the entire sense of reality conveyed by what he means by *the whole*. The whole gives parts an intelligible meaning, and drawing that conclusion violates the longstanding critique of metaphysics imposed by James's radical empiricism. According to Bradley, James's relational ontology seems superficial, an interpretation on a practical level that does not penetrate the whole of reality. Is that really true, however?

In her analysis of causality and phenomenal experience in James's *Essays on Radical Empiricism*, Charlene Haddock Seigfried shows how James intended to defend that our willing agency is the ontological reason to associate our experiencing activity with being a cause. "To call this phenomenal experience of activity a mere illusion is to prefer a hidden ontological principle that can never be experienced and thus never verified, to an experimentally verified level of investigation."¹⁰⁵ In wanting to know how relations behave logically but not be subject to the conditions of life, which James also calls "the experience of activity" misses the mark.

A metaphysics that seeks an answer completely outside experience is misguided. The mistake is in thinking that concepts are timeless, never rooted or pulled out of the perceptual flux. Instead, they blame the perceptual flux and that is the mistake James exposes in Bradley.¹⁰⁶ Substituting an Absolute Mind beyond perception means extolling a philosophical timeless concept for the perceptual flux we truly experience and then derive our concepts from that flux as a way of coping with life. "Concepts are only man-made extracts from the temporal flux."¹⁰⁷ We generalize about percepts as a sort of shorthand and the more that metaphysical speculation employs constructions that could in principle never be tested empirically, the more such speculation lies outside the scope of what could be known. In other words, such ideas might be the types of ideas that make no difference in our lives, especially if those

J. Edward Hackett

speculations never relate to the experience of the world they serve to illuminate. By contrast, the only type of speculations that make a difference are those that attempt to ground their speculations in making a difference in our lives. As James says, “Reality, life, experience, concreteness, immediacy, use what word you will exceeds our logic, overflows and surrounds it.”¹⁰⁸ In this way, logic is a way to facilitate our connecting with relations, but it does not yield insight into reality. Only our experience can do that, and it is for this reason that Bradley’s project will never succeed. It also cannot give expression to our experiences of the divine.

Such a conception of God is found extremely wanting in that it’s unclear how one experiences relation and communes with an impersonal universe that transcends the appearances through which all relations are mediated. We know this now as the God of Ontotheology, a tradition inaugurated by Plato that places God outside of space and time since at least the early Christian church fathers and Augustine. The God of ontotheology underlies the vision of God in what has become known as classical theism in philosophy of religion. In this classic conception, there exists an ontological asymmetry of God the Creator ruling and above and over creation. God is situated outside space and time and knows all temporal modes of past, present, and the future simultaneously. If I pray or meditate in relation to some Divine reality, then my experience of it must be in terms of the relations that make up my experience and those relations are part of this world. In this way, all relations of God/the Divine are within space and time. As James affirms in his own words, “I believe that the only God worthy of the *name* must be finite.”¹⁰⁹ This position, known as theistic finitism, possesses its own problems, and when we examine the role relations play in James’s experientially-based metaphysics; it’s unclear how we might reconcile theistic finitism fully with the oscillation between conjunctive and disjunctive relations in experience. For now, I have only set out to understand the immediate implication such a radically empirical metaphysics has for a potential account of James’s philosophy of religion and that shall be enough for this essay.

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J. Edward Hackett

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NOTES

¹ William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Mineola: Dover Publishing, 2003), 28. I will cite this as *ERE* hereafter.

² James, *ERE*, 1.

³ James, *ERE*, 21.

⁴ James, *ERE*, 110.

⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 270.

⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 152-153.

⁷ While I do not discuss it in this chapter, James's essay "Does Consciousness Exist" criticizes Kant's transcendental ego as if the idea were similar to the James-Lange hypothesis. The James-Lange hypothesis posits that an emotion maps onto to a change in the body. By contrast, James charges that the continual original synthesis of transcendental self-consciousness is nothing more than the phenomenological sense of the fact that I continue to breath. The I-breathe accompanies all my representations. Part of this thinking might be that the percept that gives rise to the concept of transcendental ego is forgotten, and Kant wrongly substitutes the concept of continual original synthesis for what arose out of being an embodied and alive subject. At least, that's what I take the implicit argument to be rather than James just ending the essay on an intuition he has regarding Kant's transcendental ego.

⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 153.

⁹ James, *ERE*, 3.

¹⁰ James, *ERE*, 4.

¹¹ James, *ERE*, 2.

¹² James, *ERE*, 4.

¹³ James, *ERE*, 6. Italics are mine for emphasis.

¹⁴ James, *ERE*, 110.

¹⁵ James, *ERE*, 12.

¹⁶ James, *ERE*, 13.

¹⁷ While I do not address Ermine Algaier IV's arguments in his "Reconstructing James's Early Radical Empiricism and the 'Spirit of Inner Tolerance'" in *William James Studies* 11 (2015): 46-62. concerning my metaphysically-driven interpretation of James's radical empiricism and his disagreement that not enough work has been done to address early radical empiricism situated in its social, moral, and epistemic dimensions, a reference must be made to his work. I do not agree with many points raised in the article. James worried about the final arrangement of any philosophical system including his own radical empiricism toward the end of his life, but no other scholarly work has done so much to challenge me and offer potentially new trajectory of Jamesian thought that implicates how radical empiricism should be understood.

¹⁸ James, *ERE*, 23.

¹⁹ John McDermott, "Relational World" in *Streams of Experience: Reflections on the History and Philosophy of American Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 112.

²⁰ McDermott, "Relational World," 112.

²¹ James, *ERE*, 24.

²² Withness seems barely a relation compared to space adjacency two steps more intimate. James never tells us how he intends withness when compared to spatial adjacency. Withness could just mean the barest of relations as if something not bound up with a series of terms. Most uses of the preposition in English

J. Edward Hackett

do convey proximate and spatial presence, which seems not intended by the two steps of intimacy gained in spatial adjacency and distance.

²³ James, *ERE*, 24.

²⁴ James, *ERE*, 24.

²⁵ James, *ERE*, 25.

²⁶ James, *ERE*, 27.

²⁷ James, *ERE*, 27.

²⁸ James, *ERE*, 25.

²⁹ James, *ERE*, 25.

³⁰ Informing my reading of James is Wesley Cooper's *The Unity of James's Thought* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), 42. Cooper calls James's efforts in *ERE* "an attenuated panpsychism."

³¹ James, *ERE*, 25.

³² James, *ERE*, 26.

³³ James, *ERE*, 26.

³⁴ James, *ERE*, 26.

³⁵ James, *ERE*, 28.

³⁶ For this reason, Edgar S. Brightman adopts radical empiricism as a method to engage in his philosophy of religion and later metaphysics. At the heart of James's conception of experience is that the concretization of relations is always that of the personalized form. Radical empiricism, therefore, makes for a wonderful ontological scaffolding for any personalism.

³⁷ In a footnote, James regards both the essays "On the Function of Cognition" and "The Knowing of Things Together" as those specific places in which he spells out how concepts work in a more detailed way than here. They're both reprinted in his *The Meaning of Truth*. Specifically, see *Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

³⁸ James, *ERE*, 30-31.

³⁹ James, *ERE*, 33.

⁴⁰ James, *ERE*, 32.

⁴¹ James, *ERE*, 34.

⁴² James, *ERE*, 35.

⁴³ James, *ERE*, 37.

⁴⁴ James, *ERE*, 37.

⁴⁵ James, *ERE*, 45.

⁴⁶ James, *ERE*, 39.

⁴⁷ James, *ERE*, 40.

⁴⁸ James, *ERE*, 41.

⁴⁹ James, *ERE*, 102.

⁵⁰ James, *ERE*, 45.

⁵¹ James, *ERE*, 45.

⁵² James, *ERE*, 46-47.

⁵³ Both Robert Talisse and Scott Aikin in their scholarship about William James have denied the necessity of engaging with the themes of radical empiricism as they argue what James's views amounted to. In our scholarly exchanges that occurred in *Contemporary Pragmatism*, I indeed succeeded in pointing out to them their lack of hermeneutic charitability regarding what James said his own philosophy consisted of as he does right here in the Pillon letter. For more, information regarding this exchange in the literature: See J. Edward Hackett, "Why James Can Be an Existential Pluralist: A Response to Robert Talisse and Scott Aikin" in *Contemporary Pragmatism* 14, 4 (Nov. 2017): 506-527. They responded in their paper "Pragmatism and Existential Pluralism: A Response to Hackett" in *Contemporary Pragmatism* 15, 4 (Dec. 2018): 502-514. And my response, J. Edward Hackett, "Engaging in an Accurate Assessment of William James's Pragmatism" in *Contemporary Pragmatism* 17, 1 (March 2020): 85-99.

⁵⁴ William James, *The Letters of William James*, edited by Henry James, Vol. 2 (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920), 203-204.

⁵⁵ James, *ERE*, 24.

J. Edward Hackett

⁵⁶ During a reading group of James's *Essays in Radical Empiricism* in the Summer of 2021, Dr. Luke Higgins came up with this example.

⁵⁷ Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Chaos and Context: A Study in William James* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978), 33.

⁵⁸ Seigfried, *Chaos and Context*, 34.

⁵⁹ David Lapoujade, *William James: Empiricism and Pragmatism* trans. Thomas Lamarre (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 32.

⁶⁰ James, *ERE*, 33.

⁶¹ Seigfried, *Chaos and Context*, 47.

⁶² Seigfried, *Chaos and Context*, 47.

⁶³ James, *ERE*, 33.

⁶⁴ James, *ERE*, 37.

⁶⁵ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, ed. Henry James, Jr. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 113.

⁶⁶ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 114.

⁶⁷ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 113-114.

⁶⁸ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 136.

⁶⁹ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 118.

⁷⁰ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 118.

⁷¹ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 118.

⁷² James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 119.

⁷³ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 119.

⁷⁴ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 123.

⁷⁵ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 123.

⁷⁶ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 124.

⁷⁷ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 125.

⁷⁸ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 127.

⁷⁹ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 127.

⁸⁰ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 131.

⁸¹ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 130.

⁸² James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 359.

⁸³ I wanted to thank an anonymous reviewer at *William James Studies* for this point. Addressing Bradley does make this work more coherent.

⁸⁴ T. L. S. Sprigge, *James and Bradley* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), 394.

⁸⁵ Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, 394.

⁸⁶ Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, 394. I prefer B) as the operative assumption of Sprigge's question.

⁸⁷ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 21.

⁸⁸ Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 21.

⁸⁹ Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 22.

⁹⁰ Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, 394.

⁹¹ Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, 395.

⁹² Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 23.

⁹³ Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 23.

⁹⁴ Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 22.

⁹⁵ Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, 397.

⁹⁶ Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, 397.

⁹⁷ Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, 398.

⁹⁸ Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, 398.

⁹⁹ Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, 398.

¹⁰⁰ Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 27.

¹⁰¹ Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, 399.

¹⁰² Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, 400.

¹⁰³ Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, 401.

¹⁰⁴ James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 113.

¹⁰⁵ Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* (Albany: State University Press, 1990), 323. Italics are mine for emphasis.

¹⁰⁶ James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 84.

¹⁰⁷ James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 218.

¹⁰⁸ James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 212.

¹⁰⁹ James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 125. Italics belong to James.