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**WILLIAM JAMES**

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THE PHILOSOPHY  
OF  
WILLIAM JAMES

BY  
HOWARD V. KNOX

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## PREFACE

FOR reasons of space this little study of William James's philosophy has had to restrict itself to the essential core of his doctrine, and to omit many sides of his singularly rich and sympathetic personality. Moreover, I felt that James was so supremely excellent a writer that a summary of his philosophy would be best given so far as possible in his own incomparable language. I have accordingly aimed largely at effective selection, and at stringing together his own expositions of his most important doctrines, with a minimum of explanatory comment.

But I had a further reason for letting James thus speak for himself. The dazzling brilliance of his style, his wonderful ability to write popularly and vividly, the simplicity and directness with which he goes to the heart of every problem, and his modest disclaimers of systematic finality, have combined to render it difficult for professional philosophers to attend to the technical content of

his arguments. It seemed important, therefore, to show how those very philosophic contentions which have been denounced as most revolutionary are actually contained and *technically justified* in the great *Principles of Psychology*, which have been universally admired and acclaimed as a classic. When the main drift of that work is properly understood, the organic unity of James's teaching becomes manifest. It seems charitable to suppose, therefore, that those critics who have complained of the 'merely popular' character of James's philosophy have not troubled to acquaint themselves with the contents of his *magnum opus*.

HOWARD V. KNOX.

Oxford,  
*January, 1914.*

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## CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF WILLIAM JAMES'S WORKS

*The Principles of Psychology*, 1891.

*Psychology* (Textbook), 1892.

*The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, 1897.

*Human Immortality Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine*, 1898.

*Talks to Teachers on Psychology, and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*, 1899

*The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature*, 1902. Being the Gifford Lectures delivered in Edinburgh in 1901-1902

*Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, 1907.

*The Meaning of Truth A Sequel to Pragmatism*, 1909.

*A Pluralistic Universe*. Hibbert Lectures at Manchester College on the Present Situation in Philosophy, 1909.

*Some Problems of Philosophy* (posthumous), 1911.

*Memories and Studies*, 1911.

*Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 1912. This contains the remainder of James's occasional articles, ranging from 1884 to 1905, but does not represent his latest views.

## SOME BOOKS, ETC., ON JAMES.

*La Philosophie de William James.* By Th. Flournoy. Saint-Blaise : Foyer Solidariste, 1911. An admirable book, which gives special prominence to the bearings of James's philosophy on religion

*William James.* By Émile Boutroux. Paris : Librairie Armand Colin, 1911.

The same. Translated into English by E. and B. Henderson. London : Longmans, Green and Co., 1912.

*Introduction* (by M. Henri Bergson) to *Le Pragmatisme* (a French translation of *Pragmatism*). Paris : Ernest Flammarion, 1911.

*William James* By Professor R. B. Perry, in the *Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, December, 1910. Contains a short biography.

*William James and his Message.* By Professor L. P. Jacks, in the *Contemporary Review*, January, 1911.

*In Memory of William James* By Dr. W. McDougall, in *The Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Part 62.

*William James and his Philosophy.* By H. V. Knox, in *Mind*, April, 1913.

# WILLIAM JAMES

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM JAMES (1842-1910) is probably the greatest, certainly the freshest and most original, thinker America has so far produced. And the times into which he was born were such as to stimulate to the full his natural genius. He was born late enough thoroughly to appreciate the significance for human thought of the great scientific movement of the nineteenth century, which culminated in the triumph of Darwinism in biology (1859); and yet early enough to enjoy the instruction of one of the greatest naturalists of the older generation—of Louis Agassiz—of whom he said: "The hours I spent with Agassiz so taught me the difference between all possible abstractionists and all lovers in the light of the world's concrete fulness, that I have never been able to forget it. Both kinds of mind have their place in the infinite design, but there can be no question as to

which kind lies the nearer to the divine type of thinking."\*

In virtue of his position, and helped no doubt by the circumstances of parentage and training, which brought him into intimate contact with the religious and artistic, as well as with the scientific aspects of life,† he was the first thinker to realize the full significance of the Darwinian biology. He did not conceive it superficially, merely as the last blow struck by science at religion; he perceived that it was not only fatal to the old beliefs about the fixity of species, and the crude supernaturalism and false Platonism of which that belief was the main support, but also that it cast a profound doubt on the final adequacy of the mechanistic philosophy from which it seemed to spring, and of the metaphysical prejudice that the new was nothing but a disguised form of the old. And, above all, he perceived that the characteristically Darwinian principle of *progress by individual variation* must profoundly affect our judgment of the value of the individual; while, in equal measure, the belief in the real kinship of all living creatures must quicken our powers of vital sympathy. That

\* *Memories and Studies*, p. 14 f.

† His father became a Swedenborgian, and he himself for a time took art to be his vocation.

strong sense of individual values, which is, perhaps, James's most striking mental characteristic, was without doubt native to him, and must have found expression under any circumstances; but the advent of Darwinism gave to his mind the precise *scientific* cue that it required. For of all the pre-Darwinian prejudices that had masqueraded in the guise of 'logical principles,' none was more inveterate than the 'axiom' that with individual differences science, as such, had no concern; that such differences were not merely unaccountable, but literally of no account. Thus James was opportunely helped to recognize that the artist's sympathy, which not only lingers lovingly on the concrete, but can see with another's eyes, is a scientific and philosophical, as well as an æsthetic, asset—provided always that it is the aim of science and philosophy to know the concrete reality of things. The real foundation of James's greatness, both as a psychologist and as a philosopher, lay in this keen realization that every new outlook on life, every personal predilection, has an inner value which only "a certain blindness in human beings" prevents most of us from appreciating. The humblest creature has its special way of laying hold on reality, which constitutes for it a revelation that may be withheld from ourselves.

"Take our dogs and ourselves, connected as we are by a tie more intimate than most ties in this world; and yet, outside of that tie of friendly fondness, how insensible, each of us, to all that makes life significant for the other!—we to the rapture of bones under hedges, or smells of trees and lamp-posts, they to the delights of literature and art. . . ."

"The spectator's judgment is sure to miss the root of the matter and to possess no truth. The subject judged knows a part of the world of reality which the judging spectator fails to see, knows more while the spectator knows less; and wherever there is conflict of opinion and difference of vision, we are bound to believe that the truer side is the side that feels the more, and not the side that feels the less."\*

"Living in the open air and on the ground, the lop-sided beam of the balance slowly rises to the level line. . . . The savages and children of nature, to whom we deem ourselves so much superior, certainly are alive where we are often dead, along these lines; and could they write as glibly as we do, they would read us impressive lectures on our impatience for improvement, and on our blindness to the fundamental static goods of life."†

\* *Talks to Teachers*, p. 280 f.

† *Ibid.*, p. 258.

As an illustration of James's own readiness to find wisdom in unlikely quarters, take the following: "An unlearned carpenter of my acquaintance once said in my hearing: 'There is very little difference between one man and another; but what little there is, *is very important.*' This distinction seems to me to go to the root of the matter."\*

The importance of individuals is evidently a very democratic principle, and James was a true American in holding fast to it. But his democratic faith rests, not on the figment of a natural equality of all men, but on a deep psychological insight into their infinite variety and personal uniqueness. He perceived that the community has an interest in allowing wide scope for experiments in living that may lead to salutary innovations. Hence he made room also for the apparently opposite principle of hero-worship.

The region of individual variation "is the formative zone, the part not yet ingrained into the race's average, not yet a typical hereditary and constant factor of the social community in which it occurs. It is like the soft layer beneath the bark of the tree in which all the year's growth is going on. Life has abandoned the mighty trunk inside, which stands inert and belongs almost to the inorganic"

\* *The Will to Believe*, p. 256 f.

world. The active ring, whatever its bulk, is *elementary*. If individual variations determine its ups and downs and hair-breadth escapes and twists and turns, Heaven forbid us from tabooing the study of these in favour of the average! On the contrary, let us emphasize these, and the importance of these; and in picking out from history our heroes, and communing with their kindred spirits, in imagining as strongly as possible what differences their individualities brought about in this world, while its surface was still plastic in their hands, and what whilom feasibilities they made impossible—each one of us may best fortify and inspire what creative energy may lie in his own soul.”\*

The creative energy of the individual! This is the dominant note of James’s psychology, and it is carried forward into his philosophy. It is, in fact, the vital principle that makes of his psychology and philosophy a truly organic whole, whose coherence, unlike the so-called ‘perfect coherence’ of the absolutist ‘system,’ does not exclude the possibility of growth either in knowledge or in reality. His interest in investigating the most general principles of the human consciousness is not that of ‘reducing’ individual uniqueness to its average expression, but that of exploring the field

\* *Op. cit.*, pp. 258 and 260 f. (abridged).

within which this creative energy arises. In psychology, then, where others had carelessly assumed it was 'unscientific' to see anything but an 'iron system of law' which mocks our aspirations and our unquenchable sense of moral freedom and responsibility, James found a vindication for the deep reality of human endeavour. Personality, which philosophers had naively assumed to be the source of error only, he discovered to be the fountain also of truth and of reality. God, whom theologians (Calvinists) had sought to exalt by contrasting His "eternal bliss," "omniscience," and "omnipotence," with the miserable estate of His "creatures," he invited us to welcome as man's Great Coadjutor in the warfare against all things evil. He has thus provided a rational alternative to the protean Fatalism which, under the name of Materialism in science, of Absolute Idealism in philosophy, and of Predestination in theology, had been held up for our admiration as the necessary goal of enlightened Reason. Rightly, therefore, has he been called \* "the last great Liberator of the Human Spirit."

\* In the dedication of Dr. F C S. Schiller's *Formal Logic*.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GENERAL FUNCTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

THE importance of James's work in psychology is two-fold. It was immediately recognized by psychologists as directly revolutionizing their science, and, though philosophers have even now only begun to recognize this, it put quite a new complexion on the question of the relation of psychology to philosophy. For the 'Critical' studies which had in appearance so sharply differentiated psychology from philosophy—if, indeed, they allowed psychology any right to exist at all—were now seen to be based on psychological preconceptions which James, as a *psychologist*, disavowed and overthrew.\* This, fortunately, absolves us from entering here on the futile abstract question of the relation of psychology in general to philosophy in general. We have only to consider the relation of James's psychology to the new philosophy which it inaugurates. .,

\* See *infra*, pp. 34-40, and cf. Mr. D. L. Murray's *Pragmatism*, chap. ii. (in the present series).

James once made the remark, in speaking of Spencer,\* that "everyone who writes books or articles knows how he must flounder until he hits upon the proper opening. Once the right beginning found, everything follows easily and in due order. If a man, however narrow, strikes even by accident into one of these fertile openings, and pertinaciously follows the lead, he is almost sure to meet truth in his path. Some thoughts act almost like mechanical centres of crystallization facts cluster of themselves about them."

The "fertile opening," into which James himself struck, consists primarily in a special application to animal and human consciousness of the Darwinian conception of biological utility. The secret of Darwin's scientific success was his firm grasp of the principle that a genuine explanation of biological phenomena can only be given in biological terms; and that, more particularly, an explanation of organic evolution must be couched in terms of the *interest of the organism*.

Now, "the pursuance of future ends, and the choice of means for their attainment, are the mark and criterion of the presence of mentality in a phenomenon."† By connecting this with the

\* *Memories and Studies*, p. 123 f.

† *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, p. 8.

Darwinian standpoint, the sciences of biology and psychology can be rendered essentially continuous. If, however, we start with the fixed idea that it is peculiarly 'scientific' to explain physical events solely in terms of matter and motion, or ether and motion, or motion pure and simple, we then must, as a simple matter of intellectual tactics, disavow our own spiritual activity in the manufacture of these recondite and uncanny theories, and somehow contrive to get rid of the idea that *consciousness really counts for something in the world of nature*. Or, again, we may simply wish to bring this 'mechanical hypothesis,' or bundle of hypotheses, to the final test. In either case we raise the question whether the so-called intelligent behaviour of an organism, which seems to *betray* the presence of mind, is really *produced* by mind; or whether such outward behaviour can be wholly and sufficiently 'accounted for' by the physical and chemical processes that take place in the brain and nervous system generally. This question, important as it clearly is for any philosopher not wholly careless of the concrete, is, in its first intention, a question of scientific method and of scientific fact. It is the question whether (a) physiology must, in principle, be completely independent of psychology, and (b) whether scientific

experience confirms this postulate. The affirmative answer, which yields the theory of 'automatism,' or 'parallelism,' was in James's early days almost universally, and is still commonly, adopted by the physiologists, who, however, have not always in this matter been fully alive to the difference between methodological assumption and scientific verification—i.e., between a scientific programme and a scientific achievement.

It is a curious anomaly in scientific history, explicable doubtless as a reaction from the excesses of Paley-theology, that Darwinism, which is steeped in the idea of the interest of the organism, and which should therefore by rights have stimulated to a profounder study of the nature of purpose, should *de facto* have at first emphasized the tendency to proscribe the idea of conscious purpose as wholly 'unscientific.'\* Because the purposiveness which is manifest in bodily structure and in admittedly unconscious behaviour need not by the man of science be referred to the conscious agency of an external deity, the road seemed open for a denial that conscious efficacy is to be found anywhere. Whereas, before Darwin, 'unconscious purpose' seemed self-contradictory; after Darwin it seemed, on the one hand, interpretable as meaning

\* This does not apply to Darwin himself

simply progressive adaptation, and on the other to be the only kind of purpose that science could ultimately admit. And yet such a view runs profoundly counter to the moving spirit of Darwinism. For in this view consciousness is functionless, and therefore biologically meaningless. Nor can it, by way of philosophical compensation, be regarded as the vehicle of 'disinterested knowledge'; it must be regarded rather as the vehicle of gratuitous self-deception, seeing that in practice it is impossible for us to divest ourselves of the conviction that our deliberations and personal plans really make some difference in the world of nature.

It was left to James to discover that there is nothing to be gained either scientifically, philosophically, æsthetically, or practically, by this grand epistemological postulate of the fundamental and thorough-going uselessness of all knowledge. And he began by discovering that the automaton-theory (which had at first captivated his own imagination), though professing to be strictly scientific, was put forward "on purely *a priori* and quasi-metaphysical grounds." In a footnote of great biographical interest he tells us that "the present writer recalls how, in 1869, when still a medical student, he began to write an essay showing how almost everyone who speculated about

brain-processes illicitly interpolated into his account of them links derived from the entirely heterogeneous universe of Feeling. . . . The writing was soon stopped, because he perceived that the view which he was upholding against these authors was a pure conception, with no proofs to be adduced of its reality. Later it seemed to him that whatever *proofs* existed really told in favour of their view.”\*

Elsewhere he says: “In view of the strange arrogance with which the wildest materialistic speculations persist in calling themselves ‘science,’ it is well to recall just what the reasoning is, by which the effect-theory of attention is confirmed. It is an argument from analogy, drawn from rivers, reflex actions, and other material phenomena where no consciousness *appears* to exist at all, and extended to cases where consciousness seems the phenomenon’s essential feature. *The consciousness doesn’t count*, these reasoners say; it doesn’t exist for science, it is *nil*; you mustn’t think about it at all. The intensely reckless character of all this needs no comment. It is making the mechanical theory true *per fas aut nefas*. For the sake of that

\* *Principles of Psychology*, vol. i., p. 180 n. It is instructive that when James had satisfied himself that the mechanical theory was unsupported by concrete fact, he took no interest in proving the writers he mentions to have been inconsistent.

theory we make inductions from phenomena to others that are startlingly *unlike*; and we assume that a complication which Nature has introduced (the presence of feeling and of effort, namely) is not worthy of scientific recognition at all. Such conduct may conceivably be *wise*, though I doubt it; but scientific, as contrasted with metaphysical, it cannot seriously be called." \*

As regards the "positive reasons why we ought to continue to talk in psychology as if consciousness had causal efficacy," James points out† that "the particulars of the distribution of consciousness point to its being efficacious"; that "consciousness grows the more complex and intense the higher we rise in the animal kingdom. From this point of view it seems an organ, superadded to the other organs, which maintain the animal in the struggle for existence; and the presumption, of course, is that it helps him in some way in the struggle just as they do." He proceeds to show *in what way* consciousness may be of bodily use, in view of the defects which make the nervous system "need just the kind of help that consciousness would bring provided it *were* efficacious."

\* *Op. cit.*, vol. i, p 454.

† *Op. cit.*, vol. i., p 188 f. (The quotations have been slightly abridged.)

"The study," he says, "of the phenomena of consciousness which we shall make throughout the rest of this book will show us that consciousness is at all times a *selecting agency*. The item emphasized is always in close connection with some *interest* felt by consciousness to be paramount at the time. The dilemma in regard to the nervous system seems to be of the following kind. We may construct one which will react infallibly and certainly, but it will then be capable of reacting to very few changes in the environment—it will fail to be adapted to all the rest. We may, on the other hand, construct a nervous system potentially adapted to respond to an infinite variety of minute features in the situation; but its fallibility will then be as great as its elaboration. We can never be sure that its equilibrium will be upset in the appropriate direction. All this is said of the brain as a physical machine pure and simple. Can consciousness increase its efficiency by loading its dice? Such is the problem.

"Loading its dice would mean bringing a more or less constant pressure to bear in favour of *those* of its performances which make for the most permanent interests of the brain's owner; it would mean a constant inhibition of the tendencies to stray aside.

“ Well, just such pressure and such inhibition are what consciousness *seems* to be exerting all the while. And the interests in whose favour it seems to exert them are *its* interests, and *its* alone—interests which it *creates*, and which, but for it, would have no status in the realm of being whatever. We talk, it is true, when we are Darwinizing, as if the mere *body* that owns the brain had interests; we speak about the utilities of its various organs, and how they help or hinder the body’s survival; and we treat the survival as if it were an absolute end, existing as such in the physical world, a sort of actual *should-be*, presiding over the animal and judging his reactions, quite apart from the presence of any commenting intelligence outside. We forget that in the absence of some such superadded, commenting intelligence (whether it be that of the animal itself, or only ours or Mr. Darwin’s) the reactions cannot be properly talked of as ‘useful’ or ‘hurtful’ at all. Considered merely physically, all that can be said of them is that *if* they occur in a certain way survival will, as a matter of fact, prove to be their incidental consequence. In a word, survival can enter into a purely physiological discussion only as an *hypothesis made by an onlooker* about the future. But the moment you bring a consciousness into the midst,

survival ceases to be a mere hypothesis. No longer is it, 'if survival is to occur, then so and so must brain and other organs work.' It has now become an imperative decree: 'Survival *shall* occur, and therefore organs must so work.' Real ends appear for the first time now upon the world's stage. The conception of consciousness as a purely cognitive form of being, which is the pet way of regarding it in many idealistic schools, modern as well as ancient, is thoroughly anti-psychological, as the remainder of this book will show. Every actually existing consciousness seems to itself, at any rate, to be a *fighter for ends*, of which many, but for its presence, would not be ends at all. Its powers of cognition are mainly subservient to these ends, discerning which facts further them and which do not.

"Now let consciousness only be what it seems to itself, and it will help an unstable brain to compass its proper ends. The movements of the brain *per se* yield the means of attaining these ends mechanically, but only out of a lot of other ends, if so they may be called, which are not the proper ends of the animal, but often quite opposed. The brain is an instrument of possibilities, but of no certainties. But the consciousness, with its own ends present to it, and knowing also well which possibilities lead thereto and which away,

will, if endowed with causal efficacy, reinforce the favourable possibilities and repress the unfavourable or indifferent ones.

“Thus, then, from every point of view, the circumstantial evidence against that theory [of automatism] is strong. *A priori* analysis of both brain-action and conscious action show us that if the latter were efficacious, it would, by its selective emphasis, make amends for the indeterminateness of the former; whilst the study *a posteriori* of the *distribution* of consciousness shows it to be exactly such as we might expect in an organ added for the sake of steering a nervous system grown too complex to regulate itself. The conclusion that it is useful is, after this, quite justifiable.”

In a section specially devoted to the subject of Selection, James further points out that consciousness “is always interested more in one part of its object than in another, and welcomes and rejects, or chooses, all the while it thinks. To begin at the bottom, what are our very senses themselves but organs of selection? Out of what is in itself an undistinguishable, swarming *continuum*, devoid of distinction or emphasis, our senses make for us, by attending to this motion and ignoring that, a world full of contrasts, of sharp accents, of abrupt changes, of picturesque light and shade.

"Helmholtz says that we notice only those sensations which are signs to us of *things*. But what are things? Nothing but special groups of sensible qualities which happen practically or æsthetically to interest us, to which we therefore give substantive names, and which we exalt to this exclusive status of independence and dignity. But in itself, apart from my interest, a particular dust-wreath on a windy day is just as much of an individual thing, and just as much or as little deserves an individual name, as my own body does.

"And then, among the sensations we get from each separate thing, what happens? The mind selects again. It chooses certain of the sensations to represent the thing most *truly*, and considers the rest as its appearances, modified by the conditions of the moment. Thus perception involves a twofold choice. Out of all present sensations we notice mainly such as are significant of absent ones; and out of all the absent associates which these suggest we again pick out a very few to stand for the objective reality *par excellence*. We could have no more exquisite example of selective industry.

"That industry goes on to deal with the things thus given in perception. (A man's empirical

thought depends on the things he has experienced, but what these shall be is to a large extent determined by his habits of attention. . . .

"If, now, we ask how the mind proceeds *rationaly* to connect them [*i.e.*, objects], we find selection again to be omnipotent. All reasoning depends on the ability of the mind to break up the totality of the phenomenon reasoned about into parts, and to pick out from among these the particular one which, in our given emergency, may lead to the proper conclusion. 'The man of genius is he who will always stick in his bill at the right point, and bring it out with the right element—' reason ' if the emergency be theoretical, ' means ' if it be practical—transfixed upon it.

"If, now, we pass to its æsthetic department, our law is still more obvious. Any natural subject will do if the artist has wit enough to pounce upon some one feature of it as characteristic, and suppress all merely accidental items which do not harmonize with this.

"Ascending still higher, we reach the plane of Ethics, where choice reigns notoriously supreme. An act has no ethical quality whatever, unless it be chosen out of several all equally possible. The ethical energy *par excellence* has to go farther and choose which *interest* out of several, equally

coercive, shall become supreme. The problem with the man is less what act he shall now choose to do than what being he shall now resolve to become.

“Looking back, then, over this review, we see (that the mind is at every stage a theatre of simultaneous possibilities.) Consciousness consists in the comparison of these with each other, the selection of some, and the suppression of the rest by the reinforcing and inhibiting agency of attention. The mind, in short, works on the data it receives very much as a sculptor works on his block of stone. In a sense the statue stood there from eternity. But there were a thousand different ones beside it, and the sculptor alone is to thank for having extricated this one from the rest. Just so the world of each of us, howsoever different our several views of it may be, all lay embedded in the primordial chaos of sensations which gave the mere *matter* to the thought of all of us indifferently. We may, if we like, by our reasonings unwind things back to that black and jointless continuity of space and moving clouds of swarming atoms which science calls the only real world. But all the while the world *we* feel and live in will be that which our ancestors and we, by slowly cumulative strokes of choice, have extricated out of this, like

sculptors, by simply rejecting certain portions of the given stuff. My world is but one in a million alike embedded, alike real to those who may abstract them. How different must be the worlds in the consciousness of ant, cuttle-fish, or crab!"\*

The following, then, are the salient points in James's theory of the relation between consciousness and life. (It is a theory which does not *reduce* psychology to biology, but, on the contrary, shows the necessity of *expanding* the conception of life to include consciousness.

1. By directly connecting cognition with action, James vindicates its biological utility, as against the adherents of the 'automaton-theory.' *Cognition ceases to be biologically meaningless.*

2. By showing that cognition and volition are interpenetrative, he finally supplants the old faculty-psychology, which 'explained' the mind as a congeries of independent 'powers.' *Mind becomes an organic unity of function.*

3. His explanation of the biological function of cognition flows from an entirely novel theory of its psychological nature. Knowledge is instrumental just because it does *not* passively 'reproduce' a pre-existent scheme, but presents us with alternative possibilities, from which we select in

\* *Op. cit.*, vol. i., pp. 284-289 (abridged).

accordance with our personal interests. *Mind becomes an instrument of choice.*

4. Though consciousness exists in the first place for the satisfaction of bodily needs, it can minister to these only in so far as they are consciously *felt wants*. Hence its emergence entails a new kind of vital need, namely, the need of conscious satisfaction, which, again, is the only need that is such in any but a metaphorical sense. *'Consciousness as a vital factor thus raises life to a higher denomination than that of merely physical life.'*

5. Since the environment to which an organism consciously reacts is the environment as it exists for that organism's consciousness, and since the environment as so viewed is the product of selective elimination on the part of the consciousness concerned, it follows *that conscious selection creates the known world in precisely the same sense in which 'natural selection' creates the species.* "Each of us literally chooses, by his ways of attending to things, what sort of a universe he shall appear to himself to inhabit" (vol. i., p. 424).

To sum up so far: *Darwinism without materialism* is the keynote of James's psychology. Consciousness is the realm of real ends, and in the making and fulfilment of these ends it contributes to the making of reality. Mind's destiny is not

to be a 'disinterested' spectator of ready-made existence, but to be an active participant in the shaping of the future. For the 'sensationalism' of the older psychologists, which is the expression in psychology of the intellectualist bias, James substitutes what, to mark the contrast, may be designated as a 'voluntarism.' But this does not mean that he replaces an independent 'faculty' of thought or sensation by an equally independent 'faculty' of will. It means that 'disinterested knowledge' is biologically a monstrosity, comparable not so much to the winged Pegasus as to a molluscous vertebrate.

## CHAPTER III

### HABIT

IN the last chapter we saw that James's innovations in psychology dissent from the general trend of scientific thought in his time as to the function of consciousness. But his dissent was prompted by his profounder appreciation of the scientific value of Darwinism. He saw that Darwinism, instead of enthroning mechanism as a universal principle, in reality demanded a remodelling of the fashionable mechanical interpretation of consciousness. He saw that if we are to embrace consciousness in the evolutionary scheme, we must *give up the idea that knowledge must be useless*. He faced the dilemma—either the Darwinian principle is inapplicable to animal and human consciousness, or that consciousness must be an originaive factor in the world; and he boldly chose the latter alternative. But to adopt this alternative is finally to discard the *pre-Darwinian* implications of the word 'evolution' as the opposite of 'epigenesis'—*i.e.*, as a denial of the possibility of real *novelty*. For James, the intro-

duction of real novelty is the essential function of consciousness,\* and to get it he shrank as little from recognizing the reality of 'chance' as Darwin did from postulating 'accidental variations.'

The most important distinction, it follows, in animal behaviour is that between repetition and the original solution of practical problems. Nevertheless, habit is obviously of enormous importance to animal welfare, and this seems to bring us back to purely physical laws. "The laws of Nature are nothing but the immutable habits which the different elementary sorts of matter follow in their actions and reactions upon each other."† The difference is that, while inanimate nature and unconscious organisms (if such there really are) simply *have* habits, conscious beings are enabled to form *new* habits in their individual lifetime. Moreover, the more thoroughly alive a creature is, the less rigid are its 'habits.' Both habit-making and habit-breaking are contrasted with the mechanical happenings of inanimate nature.

We are creatures of habit, not merely because habits are, or should be, useful, but also because "habit diminishes the conscious attention with which our acts are performed," and thus sets consciousness free for further conquests, whether in

\* Cf *infra*, p. 65 f.

† *Principles*, vol. i., p. 104.

the direction of forming more habits, or of coping with situations too intricate for habit's office.\* The more habitual an action grows, the more ingrained it becomes *in the nervous system*; consciousness is ever, so to speak, delegating to subordinates (which it has itself trained) whatever matters can be dealt with in a routine way. In his chapter on Habit, however, James deals not only with this thought-economizing capacity of habit, but also with the biological and ethical need for the formation of good habits rather than bad; for the semi-automatic character of habit does not automatically insure that the habitual action shall be *good*, either for the individual or for society.

It is highly characteristic of James that he makes no apology for the "very natural transition to the ethical implications of the law of habit."† It seems to him as natural to study the 'laws of mind' with a view to *self-control*, as it is to study the 'laws of nature' with a view to controlling physical forces. More so, indeed, for self-control is at the root of all active control whatsoever. For James, therefore, psychology is not a blank gazing at the 'inexorable' flow of mental events; it is a means for *perfecting the purposes* of which our conscious life is compact; it is itself an integral

\* *Op. cit.*, vol. 1., p. 113 f.

† *Op. cit.*, vol. 1., p. 120.

part of our purposeful thinking activity. This attitude is made possible for him by the fact that he abstains from assuming that in order to *understand* purpose we must treat it as a delusion. If there is one thing more than another that explains the genesis of James's philosophy, it is this. This rare and refreshing attitude, and veritable stroke of genius, emancipates psychology from the Dry-as-dusts who can see no connection between the problems of psychology and of real living. Its full significance will appear in the sequel,\* but meanwhile we may quote the following :

" If the period between twenty and thirty is the critical one in the formation of intellectual and professional habits, the period below twenty is more important still for the fixing of *personal* habits, properly so called, such as vocalization and pronunciation, gesture, motion, and address. Hardly ever is a language learned after twenty spoken without a foreign accent ; hardly ever can a youth transferred to the society of his betters unlearn the nasality and other vices of speech bred in him by the associations of his growing years. Hardly ever, indeed, no matter how much money there be in his pocket, can he even learn to *dress* like a gentleman born. The merchants offer their wares as

\* See especially p. 57 *f.*, and chap. ix.

eagerly to him as to the veriest 'swell,' but he simply *cannot* buy the right things. An invisible law, as strong as gravitation, keeps him within his orbit, arrayed this year as he was the last; and how his better-bred acquaintances contrive to get the things they wear will be for him a mystery till his dying day.

"The great thing, then, in all education, is to *make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy*. It is to fund and capitalize our acquisitions and live at ease upon the interest of the fund. *For this we must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can, and guard against the growing into ways that are likely to be disadvantageous to us, as we should guard against the plague.* The more of the details of our daily life we can hand over to the effortless custody of automatism, the more our higher powers of mind will be set free for their proper work. There is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision, and for whom the lighting of every cigar, the drinking of every cup, the time of rising and going to bed every day, and the beginning of every bit of work, are subjects of express volitional deliberation. Full half the time of such a man goes to the deciding or regretting of matters which ought to be so ingrained

in him as practically not to exist for his consciousness at all. If there be such daily duties not yet ingrained in any one of my readers, let him begin this very hour to set the matter right."\*

"A third maxim may be added to the preceding pair:† *Seize the very first possible opportunity to act on every resolution you make, and on every emotional prompting you may experience in the direction of the habits you aspire to gain.* It is not in the moment of their forming, but in the moment of their producing motor effects that resolves and aspirations communicate the new 'set' to the brain. . . . A tendency to act only becomes effectively ingrained in us in proportion to the uninterrupted frequency with which the actions actually occur, and the brain 'grows' to their use. Every time a resolve or a fine glow of feeling evaporates without bearing practical fruit is worse than a chance lost; it works so as positively to hinder future resolutions and emotions from taking the normal path of discharge. There is no more contemptible type of human character than that of the nerveless sentimentalist and dreamer, who

\* *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 121 f

† The others are: (1) "We must take care to launch ourselves with as strong and decided an initiative as possible." (2) "Never suffer an exception to occur till the new habit is securely rooted in your life."

spends his life in a weltering sea of sensibility and emotion, but who never does a manly concrete deed."\*

One hardly knows whether to admire more the moral or the psychological insight of passages like this.

\* *Principles*, vol. i, p. 124 f.

## CHAPTER IV

### PERSONALITY AND CONTINUITY

IN passing to the "study of the mind from within," in chapter ix. of the *Principles*, James notes the following as fundamental characters in the thought-process.

1. "Every thought tends to be part of a personal consciousness.

2. "Within each personal consciousness thought is always changing. \ {

3. "Within each personal consciousness thought is sensibly continuous.

4. "It always appears to deal with objects independent of itself.

5. "It is interested in some parts of these objects to the exclusion of others, and welcomes or rejects—*chooses* from among them, in a word—all the while."\*

With the last of these we have already dealt in Chapter II. This chapter we must devote to the first

\* *Principles*, vol 1., p. 225

three, which are most intimately connected. The fourth will be dealt with in Chapters VII. and VIII. First, as to personality.

"The only states of consciousness that we naturally deal with are found in personal consciousnesses, minds, selves, concrete particular I's and you's. Each of these minds keeps its own thoughts to itself. There is no giving or bartering between them. No thought even comes into direct *sight* of a thought in another personal consciousness than its own. Absolute insulation, irreducible pluralism, is the law. It seems as if the elementary psychic fact were not thought or *this thought* or *that thought*, but *my thought*, every thought being *owned*. . . . The breaches between such thoughts [belonging to different personal minds] are the most absolute breaches in nature. . . .\*

The universal conscious fact is not 'feelings and thoughts exist,' but 'I think' and 'I feel.' No psychology, at any rate, can question the *existence* of personal selves. The worst a psychology can do is so to interpret the nature of these selves as to rob them of their worth. A French writer, speaking of our ideas,

\* Later (1909), James was inclined to modify this extreme view, chiefly, it would seem, as the result of his experiences as a 'psychical researcher.' See *Memories and Studies*, pp. 201-206; and cf. *Principles*, vol. i., p. 387.

says somewhere, in a fit of anti-spiritualistic excitement, that, misled by certain peculiarities which they display, we 'end by personifying' the procession which they make, such personification being regarded by him as a great philosophic blunder on our part. It could only be a blunder if the notion of personality meant something essentially different from anything to be found in the mental procession. But if that procession be itself the very 'original' of the notion of personality, to personify it cannot possibly be wrong. It is already personified. There are no marks of personality to be gathered *abunde*, and then found lacking in the train of thought. It has them already, so that to whatever further analysis we may subject that form of personal self-hood under which thoughts appear, it is, and must remain, true that the thoughts which psychology studies do continually tend to appear as parts of personal selves."\*

The subjects of continuity and change in consciousness may be taken together, for it is continuity of change, or consciousness *as a moving continuum*, that James is most solicitous about. This feature of consciousness, which James was

\* *Principles*, vol. i., p. 226 f.

the first to urge, is sublimated into a metaphysical idea of the first rank in the philosophy of Bergson.\* James's vindication of conscious continuity rendered obsolete all previous abstract discussion of the relation of thought to time, though professed philosophers are only beginning to perceive this. Presumably, therefore, its importance is not easy to make clear. James himself subsequently summarized his view as follows :

"The conjunctive relation that has given most trouble to philosophers 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 in 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*. 'Change' in *this* case means continuous as opposed to discontinuous transition.

\* James's view first appeared in an article "On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology" (*Mind*, January, 1884). Bergson's *Données Immédiates* date from 1889.

But continuous transition is one sort of a conjunctive relation; and to be a radical empiricist means to hold fast to this conjunctive relation of all others, for this is the strategic point, the position through which, if a hole be made, all the corruptions of dialectics and all the metaphysical fictions pour into our philosophy. The holding fast to this relation means taking it at its face value, neither less nor more; and to take it at its face value means first of all to take it just as we feel it, and not to confuse ourselves with abstract talk *about* it, involving words that drive us to invent secondary conceptions in order to neutralize their suggestions and to make our actual experience again seem possible."

We should note that James is here referring to Kantian and Anglo-Hegelian 'explanations' of the 'possibility of experience,' and is not taking continuity in the highly conceptualized sense which has been constructed by some modern mathematicians.

"What I do feel simply, when a later moment of my experience succeeds an earlier one, is that, though they are two moments, the transition from the one to the other is *continuous*. Continuity here is a definite sort of experience—just as definite as is the *discontinuity experience* which I find it

impossible to avoid when I seek to make the transition from an experience of my own to one of yours.\*

“Practically to experience one’s personal continuum in this living way is to know the originals of the ideas of continuity and of sameness, to know what the words stand for concretely, to own all that they can ever mean. [*Cf. supra* James’s criticism of the attempt to depersonalize personality.] But all experiences have their conditions; and over-subtle intellects, thinking about the facts here, and asking how they are possible, have ended by substituting a lot of static objects of conception for the direct perceptual experiences. The result is that from difficulty to difficulty, the plain conjunctive experience has been discredited by both schools, the empiricist leaving things permanently disjoined, and the rationalist remedying the looseness by their [his?] absolutes or substances, or whatever other fictitious agencies of union they [he?] may have employed. From all which artificiality we can be saved by a couple of simple reflections: first, that conjunctions and separations are, at all events,

\* *Cf. Radical Empiricism*, p. 42 For a radical empiricism “the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system”

co-ordinate phenomena, which, if we take experiences at their face value, must be accounted equally real; and, second, that if we insist on treating things as really separate when they are given as continuously joined, invoking, when union is required, transcendental principles to overcome the separateness we have assumed, then we ought to stand ready to perform the converse act. We ought to invoke higher principles of *disunion*, also, to make our merely experienced *disjunctions* more truly real.”\*

This criticism, which remains up to the present unanswered, lays the axe to the tap-root of ‘transcendental idealism.’ For once the reality of continuity is admitted, all need for assuming either a ‘Soul-substance’ to be the ‘support,’ or transcendental Ego to be the ‘presupposition,’ of consciousness, disappears.

“ Our ‘ Thought ’—a cognitive phenomenal event in time—is, if it exists at all, itself the only Thinker which the facts require. The only service that transcendental egoism has done to psychology has been by its protests against Hume’s ‘ bundle ’-theory of mind. But this service has been ill-performed; for the Egoists themselves, let them say what they will, believe in the bundle,

\* *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 47 f

and in their own system merely *tie it up* with their special transcendental string, invented for that use alone. Besides, they talk as if, with this miraculous tying or 'relating,' the Ego's duties were done.\* Of its far more important duty of choosing some of the things it ties, and appropriating them, to the exclusion of the rest, they tell us never a word. . . .

"The literature of the Self is large, but all its authors may be classed as radical or mitigated representatives of the three schools we have named—substantialism, associationism,† or transcendentalism. Our own opinion must be classed apart, although it incorporates essential elements from all three schools *There need never have been a quarrel between associationism and its rivals if the former had admitted the indecomposable unity of every pulse of thought* [cf. Bergson's "Chaque mouvement est

\* A still more fatal flaw is that the Idealists, in their hurry to 'explain' the transcendental 'possibility of knowledge,' have made *progress* in knowledge impossible. See *infra*, p 72 f.

† The fundamental thesis of 'associationism,' that the concrete facts of mental life can be adequately 'explained' by the mechanical operation of the 'laws of association,' is so obviously and so completely annihilated by James's demonstration of the *selective* function of consciousness, that I have not deemed it necessary to refer directly to associationism at all.

indivisible "], and the latter been willing to allow that 'perishing' pulses of thought might recollect and know."\*

After this fashion did James endeavour to remove the metaphysical cataract that had so long blinded men to the realities of their immediate experience.

\* *Principles*, vol. 1, p. 369 f

## CHAPTER V

### WILL

IN James the transition from psychology to the larger problems of philosophy appears to occur on the question of Free Will. His philosophy avows itself a *free-will philosophy*, just as his psychology is voluntaristic; and for the same reason—viz., that he is a true Darwinian, a champion of real novelty.\* But James actually proceeds by raising the question, How can we pass from the recognition of the reality and importance of Will to the belief in Freedom? It is chiefly because psychology thus conducts directly and inevitably to the free-will problem, that psychology is for James something more than a mere branch of 'natural science'; while it is because this problem concerns the ultimate function of human consciousness that philosophy cannot cut loose from psychology. And finally it is because the attempt to solve the free-will problem by dint of 'pure reason' *begs the*

\* Cf *infra*, p. 65 f

*question* in the interest of the deterministic alternative, that for James the play of 'pure reason' is literally play, and inadequate to the serious business of life.

Since the free-will problem forms one of the nodal points wherein psychology and philosophy inosculate, James is, in his *Principles*, confronted with an awkward crux of method. How is he even to *state* the problem in psychological terms, when the solution thereof must take him far beyond the limits of psychology as a natural science—the limits within which alone psychology can lead an autonomous existence? We must appreciate this methodological difficulty if we are to grasp James's position in the *Principles*.

Before reaching his problem, James has impugned the scientific status of the automaton theory.\* He has shown that it is dogmatic and metaphysical, and that we are under no logical obligation to accept it. Now, it is true that to challenge the credentials of that theory is not enough to establish the reality of freedom. In the first place, we may arbitrarily and frankly adopt automatism as a metaphysical theory; and in the second place, we may reject it and still remain determinists. For it will still at least *seem* possible

\* Cf chap. ii., especially p. 12 f.

to maintain that within the universe 'as a whole,' conceived in terms of the rival theory of Interaction—i.e., of causal reciprocity between psychical and physical events—not Freedom, but Necessity obtains.\* James himself explicitly allows the logical possibility of such a position.† But though automatism is not convertible with determinism, it is the only form in which determinism can be sharply opposed to indeterminism, and it is the only form which appears even remotely susceptible of scientific proof. Hence, to show how arbitrary is the automaton theory, though we do not thereby prove the truth of indeterminism, does set us *logically free* to embrace this alternative, if it should appeal to us on emotional or practical grounds.

James therefore maintains that the question whether volition or attention (for "volition is nothing but attention") does or does not involve a "principle of spiritual activity" "is metaphysical as well as psychological, and is well worthy of all the pains we can bestow on it. It is, in fact, the pivotal question of metaphysics, the very hinge on which our picture of the world shall swing from

\* Such a position is assumed, *e.g.* (though not expressly argued), by Mr. W. McDougall in his important treatise on *Body and Mind*

† *Principles*, vol. 1., pp. 448 and 451

materialism, fatalism, monism [note the association of these nominally different doctrines<sup>1</sup>], towards spiritualism, freedom, pluralism—or else the other way.”\*

“The whole feeling of reality, the whole sting and excitement of voluntary life, depends on our sense that in it things are *really being decided* from one moment to another, and that it is not the dull rattling off of a chain that was forged innumerable ages ago. This appearance, which makes life and history tingle with such a tragic zest, *may* not be an illusion. As we grant to the advocate of the mechanical theory that it may be one, so he must grant to us that it may *not*. And the result is two conceptions of possibility, face to face, with no facts definitely enough known to stand as arbiter between them. Under these circumstances, one can leave the question open whilst waiting for light, or one can do what most speculative minds do, that is, look to one’s general philosophy to incline the beam. The believers in mechanism do so without hesitation, and they ought not to refuse a similar privilege to the believers in a spiritual force. I count myself among the latter, but as my reasons are ethical, they are hardly suited for introduction into a psychological work. The last

\* *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p 448.

word of psychology here is ignorance, for the 'forces' engaged are certainly too delicate and numerous to be followed in detail."\*

This quotation plainly hints at what James regards as the real problem. And later he repeats that "the question of free will is insoluble on strictly psychologic grounds," and refers us to an ethical discourse on "The Dilemma of Determinism,"† permitting himself only "a few words about the logic of the question."

"The most that any argument can do for determinism is to make it a clear and seductive conception, which a man is foolish not to espouse so long as he stands by the great scientific postulate that the world must be one unbroken fact, and that prediction of all things without exception must be ideally, even if not actually, possible. It is a *moral* postulate about the Universe—the postulate that *what ought to be can be, and that bad acts cannot be fated, but that good ones must be possible in their place*—which would lead one to espouse the contrary view. But when scientific and moral postulates war thus with each other, and objective proof is not to be had, the only course is voluntary choice, for scepticism itself, if systematic, is also voluntary

\* *Op. cit.*, vol. i., p. 453 f.]

† Now included in *The Will to Believe*.

choice. If, meanwhile, the will *be* undetermined, it would seem only fitting that the belief in its indetermination should be voluntarily chosen from amongst other possible beliefs. Freedom's first deed should be to affirm itself. We ought never to hope for any other method of getting at the truth if indeterminism be a fact. Doubt of this particular truth will therefore probably be open to us to the end of time, and the utmost that a believer in free will can *ever* do will be to show that the deterministic arguments are not coercive. That they are seductive, I am the last to deny; nor do I deny that effort may be needed to keep the faith in freedom, when they press upon it, upright in the mind."\*

James, then, even in the *Principles*, points to the conclusion that there is not, strictly speaking, any

\* *Op. cit.*, vol II, p 573 f. The position which James here takes up in developing the 'logic of the question' of free will is exactly that which he afterwards expressed, in more generalized form, in his essay on *The Will to Believe*. If the numerous critics who fell foul of that doctrine had taken the trouble to acquaint themselves with the general tenor of James's views on the subject of will as explained in his *Principles*, and had interpreted the doctrine in the light of this, its original application, we might have been spared such curiously inept objections as that James gives every man full licence to believe whatever he likes on no evidence at all.

'question of fact' involved in the free-will controversy at all. For the issue is raised, *inter alia*, of how the existence of volition as a psychical fact should modify our conception of the nature of 'fact' in general. Can 'fact,' in the end, be independent of will? Is the distinction between what *is* and what *ought to be* ultimately irreducible? Is the future, in *rerum natura*, as irrevocably fixed as the past? In a word, can we, *without begging the question as to the ultimate nature of reality*, absolutely separate the realms of Logic and Ethics? No less than this is involved in the free-will question; and James is clearly aware of it. The free-will problem he saw, as none had seen before him, brings all the philosophical disciplines to a focus, and cannot, therefore, be reduced to a mere question of psychological 'fact,' any more than it can be dismissed as *merely* metaphysical. And his distinction between 'logically coercive' proof and the moral *right to believe* will eventually lead to a thorough revision of the notion of 'logical coerciveness' itself.\*

Consequently, in apparently seeking to give a psychological formulation of the problem, James

\* James might also have pointed out that since determinism, equally with indeterminism, can only be embraced through an *arbitrary* act of choice, it is afflicted with an internal incoherence, from which the rival theory is fortunately free

must not be understood as attempting to *reduce* the problem to purely psychological terms. He is merely trying to discover *how far* it falls within the limits of psychology as a 'natural science'—i.e., as a science dealing with 'facts,' and taking its conception of 'fact' in the relatively uncritical way appropriate to science as distinguished from philosophy. So understanding him, and contenting ourselves, so far as this book is concerned, with his *interim* solution\* of the larger problem, we will in our next chapter note the more important and original points in his psychological theory of will.

\* "A common opinion prevails that the juice has ages ago been pressed out of the free-will controversy, and that no new champion can do more than warm up stale arguments which everyone has heard. This is a radical mistake. I know of no subject less worn out, or in which inventive genius has a better chance of breaking open new ground, not, perhaps, of forcing a conclusion or of coercing assent, but of deepening our sense of what the issue between the two parties really is, of what the ideas of fate and of free will imply" (*Will to Believe*, p. 145).

## CHAPTER VI

### WILL—*continued*

JAMES's theory will best be given almost entirely in his own words :

“ An anticipatory image of the sensorial consequences of a movement, plus (on certain occasions) the fiat that these consequences shall become actual, is the only psychic state which introspection lets us discern as the forerunner of our voluntary acts. There is no introspective evidence whatever of any still later or concomitant feeling attached to the efferent discharge. The various degrees of difficulty with which the fiat is given form a complication of the utmost importance to be discussed farther on.”\* [*I.e.*, there really is such a thing as an effort of will ; but this real effort must not be confounded with a purely hypothetical and useless ‘feeling of innervation,’ or discharge of nervous energy. We must note, however, in this passage, as throughout James's whole chapter on Will, a

\* *Principles*, vol. II., p. 501.

certain vagueness in his use of the word, in that he extends it to acts performed *without* any 'fiat,' and as a simple result of unimpeded attention to an idea. At the same time, it must be admitted that attention itself, being essentially *selective*, does contain an element of choice; so that it is impossible to draw a hard-and-fast line between 'effortless' attention and 'express consent.']

"The entire content and material of our consciousness—consciousness of movement, as of all things else—is thus of peripheral origin, and came to us in the first instance as through the peripheral nerves. If it be asked what we gain by this sensationalistic conclusion, I reply that we gain, at any rate, simplicity and uniformity. In the chapters on Space, on Belief, on the Emotions, we found sensation to be a much richer thing than is commonly supposed; and this chapter seems at this point to fall into line with those. Then, as for sensationalism being a degrading belief, which abolishes all inward originality and spontaneity, there is this to be said, that the advocates of inward spontaneity may be turning their backs on its real citadel, when they make a fight on its behalf for the consciousness of energy put forth in the outgoing discharge. Let there be no such consciousness; let all our thoughts of movement

be of sensational constitution ; still, in the emphasizing, choosing, and espousing of one of them rather than another, in the saying to it, 'Be thou the reality for me,' there is ample scope for our inward initiative to be shown. Here, it seems to me, the true line between the passive materials and the activity of the spirit should be drawn. It is certainly false strategy to draw it between such ideas as are connected with the outgoing and such as are connected with the incoming neural wave " (p. 517 f.).

"The first point to start from in understanding voluntary \* action, and the possible occurrence of it with no fiat or express resolve, is the fact that consciousness is *in its very nature impulsive*. . . . *Movement is the natural immediate effect of feeling, irrespective of what the quality of the feeling may be. It is so in reflex action, it is so in emotional expression, it is so in the voluntary life.* Ideo-motor action [*i.e.*, action following immediately on the idea without 'express consent'] is thus no paradox, to be softened or explained away. It obeys the type of all conscious action in which a special fiat is involved " (p. 526 f.).

"We are now in a position to describe *what happens in deliberate action* when the mind is the

\* See observation on p. 49 f

seat of many ideas related to each other in antagonistic or in favourable ways. One of the ideas is that of an act. By itself this idea would prompt a movement. Some of the additional considerations, however, which are present to consciousness block the motor discharge, whilst others, on the contrary, solicit it to take place. The result is that peculiar feeling of inward unrest known as *indecision*. . . . When finally the original suggestion either prevails and makes the movement take place, or gets definitely quenched by its antagonists, we are said to *decide*, or to *utter our voluntary fiat* in favour of one or the other course. The reinforcing and inhibiting ideas meanwhile are termed the *reasons* or *motives* by which the decision is brought about" (p. 528 f.). Volition, therefore, in the strict sense, is *choice from among presented alternatives*; and in its most typical form takes place as the resolution of a mental conflict.

James then proceeds to sketch the types of decision, of which for our present purposes only the last need be mentioned.

"In the fifth and final type of decision, the feeling that the evidence is all in, and that reason has balanced the books, may be either present or absent. But in either case we feel, in deciding, as if we ourselves by our own wilful act inclined the

beam: in the former case by adding our living effort to the weight of the logical reason which, taken alone, seems powerless to make the act discharge; in the latter by a kind of creative contribution of something instead of a reason which does a reason's work. The slow, dead heave of the will that is felt in these instances makes of them a class altogether different subjectively from all the preceding classes. What the heave of the will betokens metaphysically, what the effort might lead us to infer about a will-power distinct from motives, are not matters that concern us yet. Subjectively and phenomenally, the *feeling of effort*, absent from the former decisions, accompanies these" (p. 534)

"The existence of the effort as a phenomenal fact in our consciousness cannot, of course, be doubted or denied. Its significance, on the other hand, is a matter about which the gravest difference of opinion prevails. Questions as momentous as that of the very existence of spiritual causality, as vast as that of universal predestination or free will, depend on its interpretation. It therefore becomes essential that we study with some care the conditions under which the feeling of volitional effort is found" (p. 535).

Then follows a discussion of the difference

between the healthy and the unhealthy will. Speaking of the 'obstructed will,' James says:

"In Chapter XXI. . . . it was said that the sentiment of reality with which an object appealed to the mind is proportionate (amongst other things) to its efficacy as a stimulus to the will. Here we get the obverse side of the truth. Those ideas, objects, considerations, which (in these lethargic states) fail to *get* to the will, fail to draw blood, seem, in so far forth, distant and unreal. The connection of the reality of things with their effectiveness as motives is a tale that has never yet been fully told. The moral tragedy of human life comes almost wholly from the fact that the link is ruptured which normally should hold between vision of the truth and action, and that this pungent sense of effective reality will not attach to certain ideas" (p. 546 *f.*).

"We now see at one view when it is that effort complicates volition. It does so whenever a rarer and more ideal impulse is called upon to neutralize others of a more instinctive and habitual kind; it does so whenever strongly explosive tendencies are checked, or strongly obstructive conditions overcome. . . . Now, our spontaneous way of conceiving the effort, under all these circumstances, is as an active force adding its strength to that of the

motives which ultimately prevail. When outer forces impinge upon a body, we say that the resultant motion is in the line of least resistance or of greatest traction. But it is a curious fact that our spontaneous language never speaks of volition with effort in this way. Of course, if we proceed *a priori* and define the line of least resistance as the line that is followed, the physical law must also hold good in the mental sphere. But we *feel*, in all hard cases of volition, as if the line taken, when the rarer and more ideal motives prevail, were the line of greater resistance, and as if the line of coarser motivation were the more pervious and easy one, even at the very moment when we refuse to follow it. He who under the surgeon's knife represses cries of pain, or he who exposes himself to social obloquy for duty's sake . . . speaks of conquering and overcoming his impulses and temptations. But the sluggard, the drunkard, the coward, never talk of their conduct in that way or say they resist their energy, overcome their sobriety, conquer their courage, and so forth. . . . And if a brief definition of ideal or moral action were required, none could be given which would better fit the appearances than this: *It is action in the line of greatest resistance.*" The effort "appears adventitious and indeterminate in advance. We

can make more or less as we please, and *if* we make enough, we can convert the greatest mental resistance into the least. Such, at least, is the impression which the facts spontaneously produce upon us" (p. 548 f.).

"We have now brought things to a point at which we see that attention with effort is all that any case of volition [in the strict sense] implies. The essential achievement of the will, in short, when it is most 'voluntary,' is to *attend* to a difficult object and hold it fast before the mind. The so-doing *is* the *fiat*; and it is a mere physiological incident that when the object is thus attended to, immediate motor consequences should ensue. . . . *Effort of attention is thus the essential phenomenon of will*" (p. 561 f.).

The final statement of the psychological problem runs thus:

"If we admit that our thoughts *exist*, we ought to admit that they exist after the fashion in which they appear, as things, namely, that supervene upon each other, sometimes with effort and sometimes with ease; the only questions being, Is the effort where it exists a fixed function of the *object* [of the idea], which the latter imposes on the thought? or is it such an independent 'variable' that with a constant object more or less of it may be made?

"It certainly appears to us indeterminate, and as if, even with an unchanging object, we might make more or less as we choose. If it be really indeterminate, our future acts are ambiguous or unpredestinate; in common parlance *our wills are free*. If the amount of effort be not indeterminate, but be related in a fixed manner to the objects themselves, in such wise that whatever object at any time fills our consciousness was from eternity bound to fill it then and there, and compel from us the exact effort, neither more nor less, which we bestow upon it—then our wills are not free, and all our acts are foreordained. *The question of fact in the free-will controversy is thus extremely simple.* It relates solely to the amount of effort of attention or consent which we can at any time put forth. Are the duration and intensity of this effort fixed functions of the object, or are they not?" (p. 570 f.).

On the 'question of fact,' then, James's position is very definite. But I believe that he would have done better to trace the emergence of free will farther back, to the point where active consent emerges, irrespective of the amount, or even the quality, of effort. In a previous passage\* James does, in fact, explicitly assign to consent the importance that he here assigns to 'effort.' My sug-

\* *Principles*, vol. ii., p. 518, quoted *supra*, pp. 50-51.

gestion is that in departing from that position he is committing a strategical error similar to that which he deprecates in those who pin their faith on the 'feeling of innervation.'\*

James should, and I think would, if he had taken full advantage of his own innovations, have maintained squarely that in the last resort *Freedom and Will are synonymous*. It is plain that by 'effort,' in the passage last quoted, James means, more particularly, painful effort. Consent with 'effort,' in this sense, is no doubt the most striking self-assertion of freedom; but it occurs merely when the embraced alternative is in any respect envisaged as disagreeable, or perhaps positively repulsive. The existence of *real choice*—whether with effort or with enthusiasm—in presence of real alternatives, is, surely, the essential thing to establish. Will is choice; and if the choice is *real*, then the will is *free*.

The 'question of fact,' then, if it can be properly so called, is simply this: Is the act of will really what it seems to be to the agent himself in the act of willing? Is, or is not, will to be taken at what James calls its 'face-value'?† Determinist meta-

\* *Principles*, vol. II., p. 518, quoted *supra*, pp. 50-51

† Taking the fundamental aspects of consciousness at their 'face-value' constitutes the essence of what James (in his later use of the term) calls *radical empiricism*. Cf. *supra*, p. 86.

physicians, out of regard for the 'unity' of the universe, and determinist psychologists, out of regard for the abstract 'law of causation,' both assume unhesitatingly that will must *not* be so taken. But what does this denial really amount to? In thus asserting the *a priori* impossibility of freedom, determinists have not merely begged the question; they have also committed themselves to a most peculiar interpretation of the expression 'a Rational Universe.' For by this denial they have gratuitously converted will itself, and, indeed, 'finite consciousness' in general, into a hopelessly *untelligible* 'appearance.' And for this reason: If there is no real choice, will drags thought with it in becoming, biologically, a meaningless superfluity. *We* are not to believe that our will can perform the work which *it* believes itself to be performing; and yet no one has been able to suggest any *other* biological purpose that it might fulfil. The conception of a *functionless will* is what Determinism therefore stands for, if it means anything at all; and yet will, as the exercise of choice, is, as James has conclusively shown, just the *functional aspect of human intelligence*. In condemning freedom, therefore, Determinism has literally reduced will to a nonentity, and in so doing it has really condemned 'finite conscious-

ness' *in toto*. Nor can the situation be even verbally redeemed by the purely metaphysical (in the very worst sense of that word) interpretation of human consciousness as the 'reproduction' or 'self-revelation' of Reality. For a reproduction of *reality* is, on monistic or deterministic principles, precisely what our consciousness is *not*.\*

In other words, under the guise of denying the reality of freedom, determinists have in effect asserted that the human consciousness in general, and will in particular, represent a wild outbreak of impotent irrationality—and the greater the impotence of the consciousness, the profounder the irrationality of the outbreak—within the 'universe' whose absolute rationality they professed to vindicate. Such is the logical nemesis of refusing to take the willing-experience at its face-value on the strength of the easy-going assumption that rationality and individual freedom must be antagonistic principles. It would appear on the whole simpler, and perhaps more rational, to regard *the theory of Determinism* as an irrational outbreak on the part of certain 'finite centres of consciousness,' than to regard 'finite consciousness' as breaking up the whole scheme of a would-be 'rational'

\* This last point will be more fully brought out in our final chapter.

Universe. To dichotomize man into agent and spectator (a spectator, too, not of reality, but of 'appearance'), to set these two eternally at cross-purposes, and then arbitrarily to identify 'Reason' with the spectator rather than with the agent—can this really be the last word of philosophic enlightenment and the highest achievement of philosophic 'unification'?

In all James wrote the immediate context is all-important. If we take the *Principles* as a whole as the relevant context here, and if we bear in mind the methodological difficulty previously alluded to,\* I think we may fairly claim that the suggestions just made should rank as a legitimate interpretation of James's real meaning. At the very least this interpretation is thoroughly in harmony with his general outlook. At no stage of his development did James himself, we must remember, feel that he had finally plumbed the depths of these ultimate questions. He was not himself so faithless to the principles of the open door and the open mind of which his whole philosophy is such an eloquent defence. Speaking in 1904 of "the urgent problems of activity," he makes an admission, rare indeed among philosophers, who com-

\* P. 42

monly pretend that philosophy excels science because it must (however absurdly) *claim* finality. "So far," he says, "am I from suggesting any definite answer to such questions that I hardly yet can put them clearly."\*

But to return to James's own account of will. After discussing the "logic of the question,"† he adds these remarks on the scientific postulate of causation

"What, quite as much as the [alleged] inconceivability of absolutely independent variables, persuades modern men of science that their efforts must be predetermined, is the continuity of the latter with other phenomena whose predetermination no one doubts. Decisions with effort merge so gradually into those without it that it is not easy to say where the limit lies. Decisions without effort merge again into ideo-motor, and these into reflex, acts; so that the temptation is almost irresistible to throw the formula which covers so many cases over absolutely all. Where there is effort, just as where there is none, the ideas themselves which furnish the matter of deliberation are brought before the mind by the machinery of association." [But, as James has previously pointed out, the

\* *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 188 f.

† *Supra*, p. 45 f.

' laws of association ' cannot account for the actual course of our thoughts even in reverie. "Always some ingredient is prepotent over the rest. In subjective terms, we say that the prepotent items are those which appeal most to our *interest*."\* And interest is through and through selective.] "Really both effort and resistance are ours, and the identification of our *self* with one of these factors is an illusion and a trick of speech [according to the deterministic view]. I do not see how anyone can fail (especially when the mythologic dynamism of separate 'ideas' . . . is translated into that of brain-processes) to recognize the fascinating simplicity of some such view as this. Nor do I see why *for scientific purposes* one need give it up even if indeterminate amounts of effort really do occur. Before their indeterminism science simply *stops*. She can abstract from it altogether then ; for in the impulses and inhibitions with which the effort has to cope there is already a larger field than she can ever practically cultivate. Her prevision will never foretell, even if the effort be completely predestinate, the actual way in which each individual emergency is resolved. Psychology will be Psychology, and Science Science, as much as ever (as much and no more) in this world, whether free

\* *Principles*, vol. i., pp. 571-572.

will be true in it or not. Science, however, must be constantly reminded that her purposes are not the only purposes, and that the order of uniform causation which she has use for, and is therefore right in postulating, may be enveloped in a wider order, on which she has no claims at all " (p. 574*f.*).

In other words, determination, though a postulate of absolute *ideal* predictability in events, can never in practice be actually traced. So that Indeterminism, even if taken as covering the whole field of selective activity, cannot conflict with scientific practice, but only with a metaphysical, or quasi-metaphysical, ideal. James is, therefore, thoroughly justified in this pungent comment on Spencer: "Such ejaculations as Mr. Spencer's 'psychical changes either conform to law, or they do not. If they do not, this work, in common with all works on the subject, is sheer nonsense: no science of psychology is possible,' are beneath criticism. Mr. Spencer's work, like all the other 'works on the subject,' treats of those general conditions of *possible* conduct, within which all our real decisions must fall, whether their effort be small or great. However closely psychical changes may conform to law, it is safe to say that individual histories and biographies will never be written in advance, no matter how 'evolved' psychology may

become" (p. 576 n.). And, again, speaking of the "caricatures," in deterministic literature, "of the kind of supposition which free will demands," he points out that we must distinguish "between the possibles which really tempt a man, and those which tempt him not at all. Free will, like psychology, deals with the former possibles exclusively" (p. 577 n.).

An important quotation from *The Experience of Activity*\* may conclude this chapter: "The only 'free will' I have ever thought of defending is the character of novelty in fresh activity-situations.‡ If an activity-process is the form of a whole 'field of consciousness,' and if each field of consciousness is not only in its totality unique (as is now commonly admitted), but has its elements unique (since in that situation they are all dyed in the total), then novelty is perpetually entering the world,† and what happens there is not pure repetition, as the dogma of the literal uniformity of nature requires. (Activity-situations come, in short, each with an original touch.)"§

\* See *A Pluralistic Universe*, p. 391 n. This essay is republished also in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*.

† Italics mine

‡ Cf. *Some Problems of Philosophy*, p. 145: "Towards this issue of the reality or unreality of the novelty that

Such a declaration points forward to Bergson's 'Creative Evolution,' but the novelty it demands entered the scientific world (rather unobtrusively) with Darwin's 'spontaneous variation.'

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appears, the pragmatic difference between monism and pluralism seems to converge. That we ourselves may be authors of genuine novelty is the thesis of the doctrine of free will" And *Pragmatism*, p 257: "The essential contrast [between pragmatism and rationalism] is that for rationalism reality is ready-made and complete from all eternity, while for pragmatism it is still in the making, and awaits part of its complexion from the future" (James puts this sentence in italics.)

## CHAPTER VII

### UTILITY AND THE SURVIVAL OF BELIEFS

THE order of the *Principles* is not quite systematic, and hardly brings out the close connection which existed in James's thought between acts of belief and of will.\* But the root-idea in James's account of judgment is that belief, like will, is "a manifestation of our active nature" Belief "in its inner nature is a sort of feeling more allied to emotion than to anything else. . . . It resembles more than anything what in the psychology of volition we know as consent. . . . What characterizes both consent and belief is the cessation of theoretic agitation through the advent of an idea which is inwardly stable, and fills the mind solidly to the exclusion of contradictory ideas. When this is the case, motor effects are apt to follow. Hence

\* Cf, e g., *Principles*, vol ii, p. 321 "Will and Belief, in short, meaning a certain relation between objects and the Self, are two names for one and the same *psychological* phenomenon. All the questions which arise concerning one are questions which arise concerning the other."

the states of consent and belief, characterized by repose on the intellectual side, are both intimately connected with subsequent practical activity."\* In other words, belief, as a function of the whole man, exists for the sake of action.

Now, prior to this recognition of the intimate psychological connection between belief and action, it seemed easy to draw a hard-and-fast line between the psychology of belief or 'cognition' and logic; just as, by assuming that *in psychology* choice must be treated as an illusion, it seemed easy to draw a hard-and-fast line between the psychology of volition and ethics. For the psychologist, as such, seemed to be concerned only with belief as a subjective affection, and not at all with the distinction between true belief and false belief. That distinction, therefore, as involving the relation between mind and reality at large, belonged wholly to logic and metaphysics.

But when belief is recognized as strictly a function of the organism, and when we observe that this function is to establish harmonious relations between the organism and the circum-ambient reality, or environment, it becomes impossible to maintain so simple a distinction between psychology and logic. For belief, taken quite

\* *Principles*, vol. ii., p. 283 f.

abstractly, simply *qua* belief, has not the slightest biological meaning. Broadly speaking, it is only *true* beliefs that are useful for life. Knowledge, indeed, is power; but error spells impotence and disaster.

More precisely, the modern psychologist, just because he is also a biologist, is interested, not in consciousness as a theoretic puzzle, but in consciousness as an element in intelligent behaviour. From this standpoint he *must* distinguish between beliefs that make for efficiency and those that do not. Taken thus concretely, thought inevitably seems an instrument for *individual* and *active* adaptation to the world we live in. It is therefore in indissoluble connection with the Darwinian notions of utility and survival-value that the distinction between real truth and real error becomes relevant to psychology. 'Truth,' *functionally interpreted*, is that which subserves the organism's purposes, and 'error' is that which does not. Whatever 'truth' may be 'in itself,' truth *as applicable to life* is what we literally must have, or die. Thus vital utility is the only criterion which the living organism itself can either desire or afford to apply in the actual business of living. But the utility must, of course, be a *felt* utility, in order to be a real guide in action.

In all this, we are not laying down the law as to what 'absolute truth' must be from some supra-mundane and 'logically disinterested' point of view—a point of view which must inevitably give rise to the further questions whether *such* 'truth' is desirable, and, if desirable, attainable by man. We are simply pointing out that there is a kind of truth which *is* accessible to man, and that *this* kind of truth is not a luxury, but a necessity. This, however, is enough to give psychology admission to the preserves of logic and metaphysics. *So far* as knowledge is beneficial, the problem of the 'possibility of knowledge' is *ipso facto* solved: that is to say, it is solved by the recognition of what 'knowledge' *means* for the conscious organism.

It is quite consistent with his view of the place of consciousness in life in general, and more particularly in human life, that James does not regard that alone as beneficial which furthers mere physical existence. There is, indeed, a physical basis for the pyramid of vital needs. But a living organism that has more than material existence also has, or may have, more than material needs. What, in James's view, constitutes the continuity between these other, spiritual, needs and the basic, material, needs, is that both kinds connect with

behaviour or *conduct* of some sort.\* In this way, as we have already seen, the principle of utility, which at first was erroneously taken as of purely materialistic tendency, not only allows us, as no merely metaphysical principle does, to substitute autonomy for automatism, but also bridges the gap between the physical and the spiritual life.

The next step is that the organism's activity is not confined to adjusting itself to a merely *given* environment. Even from a merely external point of view, the organism is also busied in adjusting the environment to itself. Man, more particularly, has made the actual physical world that he now lives in a very different thing from what it was when he first made his appearance on the scene. The physical environment into which we have been born is as much a man-made as a 'natural' environment. So much is quite obvious. But still more important is the 'subjective' manipulation to which the 'environment' is subjected by the process of conscious selection. This selection, just because it is purposive, is not merely arbitrary; it is always experimental. But *so far as the experiment is successful, it actually creates the world as that*

\* Cf., e.g., "Reflex Action and Theism" in *The Will to Believe*, and *infra*, pp. 91-93

*exists for consciousness.* This is what, even more than his discovery of the principle of continuity in consciousness, so sharply differentiates James's empiricism from that of the older empiricists, from Locke to Spencer, who always sought to explain knowledge as the passive 'reproduction' of an 'independent order of nature.' For these older empiricists, 'learning by experience' meant the hoarding of sense-impressions; and anything beyond this was not fact, but 'fiction,' as Hume expressly maintains. But, for James, 'learning by experience' means learning *by experiment*, and 'pure fact' is the greatest fiction of all. In the extension of knowledge, thought does not simply lean on experiential data; it leads the way, and the function of experience is chiefly to confirm or reject postulates which passive experience and the 'laws of association' can never automatically generate. The difference between these two views corresponds exactly with the difference between the Darwinian and Spencerian views as to the main factors in organic evolution.\*

On the other hand, what chiefly distinguishes James's view, both from the so-called 'Critical

\* All this is very fully set forth in the remarkable chapter on "Necessary Truths and the Effects of Experience" which concludes the *Principles*

Philosophy' of Kant,\* and from the 'Objective Idealism' of the English Idealists (neo-Kantians or neo-Hegelians, as they are indifferently called), is that James is not so intent on explaining the 'possibility of knowledge' as to overlook the necessity of allowing for the possibility of real and effective criticism.

His conception of the nature of 'knowledge,' while it precludes the severance of 'knowledge' from 'reality,' does not exclude either the possibility of progress in knowledge or of development in reality. *Just because* James adopts the common-sense view which regards thought as a temporal and personal process, the 'constructive activity of thought' in which he believes is for him no violent metaphor, but a living reality; and the construction does not exclude *re*-construction. Contrariwise, in the hands of the 'Idealists,' for whom thought is essentially 'timeless,' "The Reality coalesces with the connected manifold, the Psychologist with the Ego, knowing becomes 'connecting,' and there results no longer a finite or criticizable, but an 'absolute' Experience, of which the Object and the Subject are always the same. . . . This 'solipsistic' character of an Experience conceived as

\* For James's relation to Kant, apart from the English versions (or perversions) of his teachings, see *infra*, p. 81 *f*

absolute really annihilates psychology as a distinct body of science,"\* and with it the reality, and even the possibility, of *human* knowledge.

We see, therefore, that, in the favourite phrase of *Histories of Philosophy*, James may be said to 'mediate' between Hume and Kant. But the 'mediation' bears a wonderful resemblance to the act of knocking their heads together; and it clearly supersedes them both.

\* *Principles*, vol. 1., p 366.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BELIEF AND VALUE

IN the last chapter of the *Principles* James makes very clear a distinction that is implicit in his earlier chapters—the distinction, namely, between the origin and survival of beliefs, or between conscious experiment and experimental confirmation. A belief to be taken up at all must in some way or other appeal to us; it must connect with our emotional nature and our vital needs. But since beliefs do not provide us with mere ‘objects of contemplation,’ and are genuine in proportion to their driving power in action, it follows that only those can *survive* which do actually fulfil the hopes in which we embraced them. James’s view may be summarily stated as the theory that what determines the survival of beliefs is an inter-play between conscious selection and natural selection. That is clearly what the view of experience as experimentation, taken in conjunction with the “paramount reality of sensations,”\* necessarily

\* *Principles*, vol. ii., p. 299 f.

entails. We make the environment to fit; but it is the obligation to cut our coat according to our cloth that gives us a chance of really using our brains. The further consideration, however, must not be overlooked, that while, on the one hand, experimental 'success' may not be final, on the other hand, experimental 'failure' need not be so either. There is, in fact, nothing from which we learn so much as from our mistakes. If we survive the failure of a vital experiment, we can try again on other lines; and if we don't survive it, our fellows may profit by the vicarious experience. This is notoriously true even of animals like wolves and foxes.

Out of these considerations arises what we may call the Question of Value. What sort of end, or ends, beyond the primary one of physical existence—with which the "paramount reality of sensations" is most intimately connected—does human thought seek to compass? And what sort of results can we acquiesce in? This is the question which James first brings to light and then sets himself to answer in his chapter on "The Perception of Reality." His chief points seem to be these:

Our system of beliefs as a whole, the reality that we seek, must be such as to satisfy our whole con-

crete nature, and not that impossible abstraction called the 'pure intellect.' We do, indeed, seek unity. But the unity that we are really interested in is not a cold, 'cosmic unity,' but a unification of our *personal self*, which will allow free play to all the component parts of our nature, without reducing any one of them to the level of mere illusion. That is what constitutes James's anti-intellectualism.

What satisfies one man will not, in all its detail, satisfy another. That is what constitutes James's individualism. This, however, is *not* an anti-social force. For if agreement is the conservative element in social life, in the *agreement to differ*—i.e., to allow each man to try his own vital experiments *at his own risk*—lies the only hope of *social progress* through the adoption of what turn out to be salutary innovations.\* Even in the case of such sharply contrasted categories as criminal and saint, we must not forget that the criminal of one generation—the man, e.g., who furnishes aid and comfort to a runaway slave—may be the moral hero of the next; even as the saint of yesterday—the man,

\* Cf., e.g., *Memories and Studies*, p. 318 "The notion that a people can run itself and its affairs anonymously is now well known to be the silliest of absurdities. Mankind does nothing save through initiatives on the part of inventors, great or small, and imitation by the rest of us—these are the sole factors active in social progress."

*e.g.*, who elects to spend his life perched on a pillar—may be the moral lunatic of to-day. Society must, of course, in each generation decide what degree and what manner of individual initiative to allow; but it makes this decision at *its own* risk. Thus James's individualism provides for the practice of toleration a rational basis which is not to be found in the rival and wholly sterile conception of 'absolute truth.'

Whatever kind or degree of unity we 'find' in Nature is *made* by our own exertions. That is what constitutes James's activism or voluntarism.\*

The constructive work of intelligence, however, is

\* To Hume, and not to Kant, belongs the credit of having first seen that the 'uniform order' of Nature is not an original datum of experience, but an intellectual construction. Neither of these writers, however, deemed the world so constructed to be fully *real*. Hume held that the result of mental manipulation must be 'fiction,' and Kant that we know only 'phenomena,' and not things as they really are in themselves. The difference between these two general theories of 'knowledge' is not very appreciable. Nor is it very easy to understand why Kant should be represented as having 'answered,' rather than echoed, Hume as regards the status of the principle of causality. But it appears to be a cardinal doctrine of the idealistic faith that what in Kant is ennobling and splendid insight, in Hume is degrading 'scepticism'. The only *real* answer to Hume lies in that *revaluation* of mental manipulation that James has effected (*cf. Some Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 200-202).

not achieved at one stroke, and is certainly not yet completed, if it ever will be. "In a simple and direct way these questions cannot be answered at all." [*I.e.*, they cannot be answered *a priori*.] "The whole history of human thought is but an unfinished attempt to answer them. For what have men been trying to find out since men were men but just those things: 'Where do our true interests lie—which relations shall we call the intimate and real ones—which things shall we call living realities and which not?'"\* That is what constitutes James's progressivism or evolutionism.

Hence there can be no *a priori* guarantee that 'all will come right in the end.' Risk cannot be eliminated from the spiritual any more than from the physical life. As in the physical life we must have courage, so in the spiritual life we need faith. This last point, which constitutes what we may call James's 'fideism,' being of a more specially ethical character, is not directly brought out in the *Principles*. It is developed in some of his later writings,† but its full meaning can only be properly appreciated if we have grasped its psychological foundation. This is, perhaps, why James's critics

\* *Principles*, vol. ii, p. 299.

† Especially in the essay "Is Life Worth Living?" in *The Will to Believe*.

have generally failed to appreciate the fact that James steadily refuses to confound *moral confidence* with 'logical certitude.' To accuse James of irrationalism because he thus justifies acts of faith is as if one were to accuse a soldier of stupidity because, in performing some deed of valour, he could have had no guarantee that he would both succeed in his venture and come out of it alive. There certainly are people who flatter themselves that they are much too sensible to risk their lives in that way, or to act, in issues of life and death, on anything short of 'reasonable certainty.' But the eminent reasonableness of their attitude does not prevent others from calling them by an exceedingly unpleasant name. And, as James has pointed out, where act we must, our *confidence* that we shall succeed may itself be a main factor in procuring our success.\*

"There is really no scientific or other method by which men can steer safely between the opposite dangers of believing too little or of believing too much. To face such dangers is apparently our duty, and to hit the right channel between them is the measure of our wisdom as men. It does not follow, because recklessness may be a vice in soldiers, that courage ought never to be preached

\* *Will to Believe*, p. 59.

to them. What should be preached is courage weighted with responsibility—such courage as the Nelsons and Washingtons never failed to show after they had taken everything into account that might tell against their success, and made every provision to minimize disaster. I do not think that anyone can accuse me of preaching reckless faith. I have preached *the right of the individual to indulge his personal faith at his personal risk.*\* I have discussed the kinds of risk; I have contended that none of us escape all of them; and I have only pleaded that it is better to face them open-eyed than to act as if we did not know them to be there.”†

In regard to all the foregoing points, James, as befits his psychological standpoint, is, so to speak, proceeding from within outwards. Starting from the *aperçu* that thought is the intellectual aspect of the *will to live*, he in effect asks what characteristics and what possibilities ‘reality’ must offer us in order to get itself *accepted* by us, and in order to make the difficult business of living seem worth while. This, finally, is what constitutes James’s ‘anthropocentrism’ or ‘relativism.’ There is an unmistakable analogy between this general position and the ‘Copernican revolution’ which Kant believed himself to have effected in philosophy.

\* Italics mine.

† *Will to Believe*, Preface, p. xi

With this difference—that James's avowedly psychological standpoint not only makes the thought-process a *real* process in time, and thereby makes *real progress* possible, but also saves him from the theoretically and practically ruinous divorce between the 'theoretical' and the 'practical' reason, in which Kant's philosophy culminates, and collapses.

A highly important corollary, as to the relation of logic to psychology, follows from James's treatment of the distinction between 'real' and 'unreal.' The primary concern of the logician is *neither* with that purely formal 'reality' which every object of consciousness possesses, and in which the distinction between 'real' and 'unreal' has not yet emerged, *nor* with the 'real world' which we all naively and uncritically take for granted as distinct from 'unreality,' until we consider the need and difficulty of effectively distinguishing the one from the other. What he really has to elucidate is just *the distinction itself* between the 'real' and the 'unreal.' And in order to do this he has to catch both 'reality' and 'unreality' in the making—*i.e.*, in that midway position between (a) merely presented object or suggestion, and (b) object definitely accepted as real or rejected as unreal, wherein the whole process of *thinking* and

of conscious experimenting goes on. But this is simply the psychological method of dealing with the thinking process. We have already seen \* that the psychologist must take cognizance of the distinction between truth and error; and now it appears that the psychological method, which treats thought as a personal and temporal process, does not merely *allow* us to deal with the cognate distinction of 'real' and 'unreal,' it is the only method that *enables* us to do so. Hence, instead of logic being sharply differentiated from psychology (as absolutists have fondly imagined) by possessing a monopoly in this fundamental distinction, it turns out that to abstract from time and personality is to abstract also from the consideration of judgment as true-or-false. A 'logic' that 'emancipates' itself from psychology, therefore, will be a 'logic' which, in repudiating its *raison d'être*, sinks to the level of a mere grammatical exercise. Thus, by bringing out, in his chapter on 'The Perception of Reality,' the thoroughly psychological character of the distinction between the 'real' and the 'unreal,' James is laying the foundations of a real logic that is to deal with the problems of real knowing. The history of 'logic,' before James, is simply the trail of its weary wanderings in the infruc-

\* P. 69 f.

tuous deserts of formalism and verbalism.\* Now at last logic is brought definitely within sight of the promised land of real knowledge, which the mere men of science who, fortunately for themselves, knew not 'logic' have for centuries been quietly cultivating. At the same time that he rescues logic from formalism, James makes clear the impossibility of defining psychology as the science of the 'subjective' in any sense that simply excludes the 'objective.' The extracts we now give will illustrate also the psychological impossibility of correlating *real* objectivity with 'pure intellectuality'—*i.e.*, with intellect purged of emotional interest:

"The total world of which the philosophers must take account is . . . composed of the realities *plus* the fancies and illusions. Two sub-universes at least, connected by relations which philosophy tries to ascertain! Really there are more than two sub-universes of which we take account, some of us of this one, and others of that. For there are various categories of illusion and of reality, and alongside of the world of absolute error (*i.e.*, error confined to single individuals), but still within the

\* Even Mill, keenly as he felt the defects of formalism, fell a victim to it in his 'inductive logic.' See Dr. F. C. S. Schiller's *Formal Logic*, p 261 *f.*

world of absolute reality (i.e., reality believed by the complete philosopher), there is the world of collective error, there are the worlds of abstract reality, of relative or practical reality, of ideal relations, and there is the supernatural world. The popular mind conceives of all these sub-worlds more or less disconnectedly; and when dealing with one of them, forgets for the time being its relations to the rest. The complete philosopher is he who seeks not only to assign to every given object of his thought its right place in one or other of these sub-worlds, but he also seeks to determine the relation of each sub-world to the others in the total world which *is*." \*

"Every object we think of gets at last referred to one world or another of this or of some similar list. . . . Each world, *whilst it is attended to*, is real after its own fashion, only the reality lapses with the attention.

"Each thinker, however [note how concretely James speaks, and avoids 'the' generalized mind], has dominant habits of attention; and these *practically elect from among the various worlds some one to be for him the world of ultimate realities*. From this world's objects he does not appeal. Whatever positively contradicts them must get into another world or die. . . .

\* *Principles*, vol. ii., p. 291.

"In all this the everlasting partiality of our nature shows itself, our inveterate propensity to choice. For, in the strict and ultimate sense of the word existence, everything which can be thought of at all exists as *some* sort of object, whether mythical object, individual thinker's object, or object in outer space and for intelligence at large. . . . The mere fact of appearing as an object at all is not enough to constitute reality. That may be metaphysical reality, reality for God; but what we need is practical reality, reality for ourselves; and to have that an object must not only appear, but it must appear both *interesting* and *important*. The worlds whose objects are neither interesting nor important we treat simply negatively, we brand them as *unreal*.

"*In the relative sense*, then, the sense in which we contrast reality with simple *unreality*, and in which one thing is said to have *more* reality than another, and to be more believed, *reality means simply relation to our emotional and active life*. This is the only sense which the word ever has in the mouths of practical men. . . .

"*The fons et origo of all reality, whether from the absolute or the practical point of view, is thus subjective, is ourselves*. As bare logical thinkers, without emotional reaction, we give reality to whatever

objects we think of, for they are really phenomena, or objects of our passing thought, if nothing more. But, *as thinkers with emotional reaction, we give what seems to us a still higher degree of reality to whatever things we select and emphasize and turn to* WITH A WILL. . . .

“We reach thus the important conclusion that *our own reality, that sense of our own life which we at every moment possess, is the ultimate of ultimates for our belief.* . . . As Descartes made the indubitable reality of the *cogito* go bail for the reality of all that the *cogito* involved, so we all of us, feeling our own present reality with absolutely coercive force, ascribe an all but equal degree of reality, first to whatever things we lay hold on with a sense of personal need, and second to whatever further things continuously belong with these. . . .

“The world of living realities as contrasted with unrealities is thus anchored in the Ego, considered as an active and emotional term. . . . *Whatever things have intimate and continuous connection with my life are things of whose reality I cannot doubt. Whatever things fail to establish this connection are things which are practically no better for me than if they existed not at all.*”\*

“The merely conceived or imagined objects

\* *Op cit.*, vol. ii, pp 298 298.

which our mind represents as hanging to the sensations (causing them, etc.), filling the gaps between them, and weaving their interrupted chaos into order, are innumerable. Whole systems of them conflict with other systems, and our choice of which system shall carry our belief is governed by principles which are simple enough, however subtle and difficult may be their application to details. *The concerned system, to pass for true, must at least include the reality of the sensible objects in it, by explaining them as effects on us, if nothing more. The system which includes the most of them, and definitely explains, or pretends to explain, the most of them, will, ceteris paribus, prevail.* It is needless to say how far mankind still is from having excogitated such a system. But the various materialisms, idealisms, and hylozoisms show with what industry the attempt is for ever made. It is conceivable that several rival theories should equally well include the actual order of our sensations in their scheme, much as the one-fluid and two-fluid theories of electricity formulated all the common electrical phenomena equally well. The sciences are full of these alternatives. Which theory is, then, to be believed? *That theory will be most generally believed which, besides offering us objects able to account satisfactorily for our sensible experience, also*

*offers those which are most interesting, those which appeal most urgently to our æsthetic, emotional, and active needs.* So here, in the higher intellectual life, the same selection among general conceptions goes on which went on among the sensations themselves. . . .

“A philosophy whose principle is so incommensurate with our most intimate powers as to deny them all relevancy in universal affairs, as to annihilate their motives at one blow, will be even more unpopular than pessimism. Better face the enemy than the eternal Void! This is why materialism will always fail of universal adoption, however well it may fuse things into an atomistic unity, however clearly it may prophesy the future eternity. For materialism denies reality to the objects of almost all the impulses which we most cherish. The real *meaning* of the impulses, it says, is something which has no emotional interest for us whatever. But what is called extradition is quite as characteristic of our emotions as of our sense. Both point to an object as the cause of the present feeling. What an intensely objective reference lies in fear! In like manner an enraptured man, a dreary-feeling man, are not simply aware of their subjective states; if they were, the force of their feelings would evaporate.

Both believe there is outward cause *why* they should feel as they do: either, 'It is a glad world! how good is life!' or, 'What a loathsome tedium is existence!' Any philosophy which annihilates the validity of the reference by explaining away its objects, or translating them into terms of no emotional pertinency, leaves the mind with little to care or act for. This is the opposite condition from that of nightmare, but when acutely brought home to consciousness, it produces a kindred horror. In nightmare we have motives to act, but no power; here we have powers, but no motives. A nameless *Unheimlichkeit* comes over us at the thought of there being nothing eternal in our final purposes, in the objects of those loves and aspirations which are our deepest energies. The monstrously lop-sided equation of the universe and its knower, which we postulate as the ideal of cognition, is perfectly paralleled by the no less lop-sided equation of the universe and the *doer*. We demand in it a *character* for which our emotions and active propensities shall be a match. Small as we are, minute as is the point by which the Cosmos impinges upon each one of us, each one desires to feel that his reaction at that point is congruous with the demands of the vast whole, that he balances the latter, so to speak,

and is able to do what it expects of him. But his abilities to 'do' lie wholly in the line of his natural propensities. As he enjoys reaction with such emotions as fortitude, hope, rapture, admiration, earnestness, and the like, and as he very unwillingly reacts with fear, disgust, despair, or doubt—a philosophy which should legitimate only emotions of the latter sort would be sure to leave the mind a prey to discontent and craving.

"It is far too little recognized how entirely the intellect is built up of practical interests. The theory of Evolution is beginning to do very good service by its reduction of all mentality to the type of reflex action. Cognition, in this view, is but a fleeting moment, a cross-section at a certain point of what in its totality is a motor phenomenon. In lower forms of life no one will pretend that cognition is anything more than a guide to appropriate action. The germinal question concerning things brought for the first time before consciousness is not the theoretic 'What is that?' but the practical 'Who goes there?' or rather, as Horwicz has admirably put it, 'What is to be done?'—'*Was fang' ich an ?*' In all our discussions about the lower animals the only test we use is that of their *acting* as if for a purpose. Cognition, in short, is incomplete until discharged in act. And

although it is true that the later mental development, which attains its maximum through the hypertrophied cerebrum of man, gives birth to a vast amount of theoretic activity over and above that which is immediately ministerial to practice, yet the earlier claim is only postponed, not effaced, and the active nature asserts its rights to the end. . . .

“If we survey the field of history and ask what feature all great periods of revival, of expansion of the human mind, display in common, we shall find, I think, simply this: that each and all of them have said to the human being, ‘The inmost nature of the reality is congenial to *powers* which you possess.’

“*In se* and *per se* the universal essence has hardly been more defined by any of these formulæ than by the agnostic *x*; but the mere assurance that my powers, such as they are, are not irrelevant to it, but pertinent, that it speaks to them and will in some way recognize their reply, that I can be a match for it if I will, and not a footless waif, suffices to make it rational to my feeling in the sense given above. Nothing could be more absurd than to hope for the definitive triumph of any philosophy which should refuse to legitimate, and to legitimate in an emphatic manner, the more powerful of our

emotional and practical tendencies. Fatalism, whose solving word in all crises of behaviour is 'All striving is vain,' will never reign supreme, for the impulse to take life strivingly is indestructible in the race. Moral creeds which speak to that impulse will be widely successful in spite of inconsistency, vagueness, and shadowy determination of expectancy. Man needs a rule for his will, and will invent one if one be not given him."\*

In short, beliefs which a man cannot *live with* he has no option but to discard ; beliefs he cannot *live without* he must find reasons to adopt. These too are corollaries from Darwinism, which philosophic theories must assimilate if they themselves are to live.

\* *Op cit*, pp. 311-315

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF THEORY AND THE THEORETIC VALUE OF PRACTICE

IF it be asked why so much space has been devoted to the psychology of James, the answer is simple. The revolution that James's philosophy effects consists precisely in breaking down the barrier between philosophy and psychology. Hence, his *Principles of Psychology* is by far the most truly philosophical work that he has produced ; and, in fact, all his subsequent work consists in popularizing and applying his psychological discoveries. He has neither reduced metaphysics to psychology, nor dissolved psychology in metaphysics. Nor, again, has he anywhere indulged in the intellectual game of deducing *a priori* what must 'necessarily' be the relation between these two disciplines. What he *has* done is to transform the whole philosophic outlook by restoring to psychology a vast territory which in virtue of the traditional distinction between metaphysics and psychology it fell to neither of

these to explore. Since metaphysics and psychology between them laid claim to the whole realm of Reality, this particular territory had been automatically made to appear as the *locus* of mere subjective illusion. But the territory in question is that of *real life and action*, it is the home of *human personality and will*.

Whether this new world, of which James was the philosophic Columbus, is to be assigned to psychology or to philosophy, or whether a new name should be found for such virgin soil, to dissociate its cultivators from the intellectual scandals of the past, need not now be definitely decided. We may retain, provisionally and without prejudice, the verbally honorific name of 'philosophic' for any inquiry into the nature of reality that cannot conveniently be designated as 'purely scientific.'

Using the word 'philosophy' in this intentionally vague sense, which alone will enable us to include, *e.g.*, Hegel's speculations concerning the causes of the moon's sterility in the same field of study with James's defence of the freedom of the will, we may delineate James's philosophy as follows: It essentially consists in the discovery that, under cover of an assumed distinction between philosophy and psychology, all the most vital

questions of philosophy—questions concerning the nature of truth, of freedom, and of the meaning of life—have been either burked or begged—and begged, moreover, in the interests of no one but the sceptic and the pessimist. For what purported to be purely rational deductions about reality turn out to be nothing but the unfolding of the implications latent in this arbitrary distinction, or else ingenious attempts to disguise these implications. When once one has detected the trick of this intellectual *legerdemain*, one can no longer doubt the greatness of James's contribution to philosophy.

The intellectualist tradition which James controverts attains its apogee, or maximum remoteness from anything that has meaning for denizens of the earth, in the 'monism' that claims the title of Absolute or Objective Idealism. This system had, when James began to write, attained such a pitch of academic orthodoxy that any dissentient was promptly told he was 'no philosopher.' It required therefore no small degree of courage to declare: "I myself have come, by long brooding over it [*i.e.* the antithesis of monism and pluralism], to consider it the most central of all philosophic problems, central because so pregnant. I mean by this, that if you know whether a man is a decided monist or a decided pluralist, you perhaps know

more about the rest of his opinions than if you give him any other name ending in *ist*. To believe in the one or in the many, that is the classification with the maximum number of consequences." \*

For this monism, the essence of rationality consists in conceiving the universe as a rigid logical system, or (in James's phrase) as a 'block-universe,' in which every part is determined through-and-through by its relation to the whole. In such a system the distinction between past, present, and future is avowedly illusory, and altogether irrelevant to the central core of reality. So far as mundane events are allowed to have reality—and *how* far they have any is treated as a trivial and almost frivolous question, on which serious philosophy is under no obligation to make up its mind—future events are just as real, and just as fixed as the whole past. *So far* as the historical process is real, it is the 'progressive revelation' or 'manifestation' (illuminating phrase!) of what in its

\* *Pragmatism*, p. 129. *Of. Some Problems of Philosophy*, p. 114 f. "The alternative between pluralism and monism . . . is the most pregnant of all the dilemmas of philosophy, although it is only in our time that it has been articulated distinctly. Does reality exist distributively or collectively in the shape of *eaches*, *everys*, *anys*, *ethers*, or only in the shape of an *all* or *whole*? Pluralism stands for the distributive, monism for the collective form, of being."

essential 'logical' nature is a perfect and timeless Whole.

The direct and intentional result of this monistic view, is to reduce to a sheer illusion that power of *individual initiative* which each of us seems to himself to possess. It is an illusion bound up with the equally illusory sense of distinct *personality* with which every sane human being is incurably afflicted. Yet even the philosopher who officially deplors this distressing superstition does not pretend to set it aside in his daily life. He merely admits that his 'theory' is at war with his practical needs. In his own eyes, however, this admission must confirm, rather than invalidate, the 'theory.' For, *ex vi definitionis*, 'pure' theory not only need not, but must not, be influenced by practical considerations. ✓ The more unequivocally, then, a 'theory' reduces practice to illusion, the more fitting shrine does it become for philosophic 'truth.' ✓

The protests of practice, therefore, affect the absolutist not at all. And if once we allow this disjunction between theory and practice (which has disastrously dominated philosophy since the time of Aristotle), and identify reason with 'pure theory,' we can never hope to vanquish Absolutism by purely 'rational' or 'theoretic' argument. For

Absolutism is in very truth the objectification of this idea of 'pure theory.' To a mind so steeped (however unconsciously) in the traditions of Formal Logic as is the mind of the absolutist, to attack the theory *must* seem to be attacking Reason itself. If the monistic principle *really is* the 'presupposition' of rational knowledge, then merely to question it is to be guilty of self-contradiction. Thus monism, all the more because it is practically intolerable, seemed to be *theoretically* irrepressible. ~

Hence, as James points out, "the world's oneness has generally been affirmed . . . as if anyone who questioned it must be an idiot. The temper of monists has been so vehement as almost at times to be convulsive. . . . The theory of the Absolute, in particular, has had to be an article of faith, affirmed dogmatically and exclusively. The One and All first in the order of being and of knowing, logically necessary itself, and uniting all lesser things in the bonds of mutual necessity, how could it allow of any mitigation of its inner rigidity? The slightest suspicion of pluralism, the minutest wiggle of independence of any one of its parts from the control of the totality, would ruin it. Absolute unity brooks no degrees—as well might you claim absolute purity for a glass of

water because it contains but a single little cholera germ. The independence, however infinitesimal, of a part, however small, would be to the Absolute as fatal as a cholera germ." \*

But if Absolute Idealism thus easily survives, as a 'theory,' any conflict with our practical interests, it is not so easy, once the illusions of practice have been systematically discounted, to discover what positive significance that theory retains. For what thus survives is not the concrete vision of all reality which we were promised at the outset, but just the magic word 'Universe.' That the world is 'somehow' (*i.e.*, inexplicably) 'one,' turns out to be the sole content of 'metaphysic.' Thus *Absolutism, if judged by its performance and not by its professions, shrivels to a bare negation of the reality alike of human knowledge and of freedom.*† If, in perusing any idealistic work, we skip all the preliminary subtleties about the 'necessary conditions of the possibility of knowledge,' the perfect 'rationality of the real,' the absurdity of the conception of the 'Unknowable,' and so forth, and turn expectantly

\* *Pragmatism*, p. 159 f.

† Cf. *Some Problems of Philosophy*, p. 189: "Possibility, as distinguished from necessity on the one hand, and from impossibility on the other, is an *essential category of human thinking* For monism, it is a pure illusion." [*Italics mine.*]

to the final revelation of reality as it really is, all it ever comes to is something of this sort :

“The consummation of the infinite aim consists merely in removing the illusion which makes it seem yet unaccomplished. Good and absolute goodness is eternally accomplishing itself in the world, and the result is that it needs not wait upon *us*, but is already . . . accomplished. It is an illusion under which we live. . . . In the course of its process the Idea makes itself that illusion, by setting an antithesis to confront it, and its action consists in getting rid of the illusion which it has created.”\*

The Idea, then, succeeds in undeceiving *Itself*. But not *us*. *Our* humble rôle is merely to form a screen on which the illusion shall continue for ever to be displayed, in order that the Infinitely Knowing Absolute may enjoy the exquisite triumph of seeing through it! Such is the Idealist's final *definition* of ‘perfect rationality,’ such the fulfilment of his promise to make reality transparent to our intelligence.

\* Hegel, quoted by James in *A Pluralistic Universe*, p 51 *f*. Of the English Idealists, Mr F. H. Bradley has been most commended for the scholarly thoroughness with which he reduces the world we live in and its inhabitants to ‘mere appearance,’ leaving to the Absolute the whole credit of reconstituting Reality ‘somehow.’

It follows, however, that in its own queer way Absolutism has anticipated James's humanistic protest: to admit a radical contrast between the human and the absolute 'point of view' is to admit that *in actual human knowledge* "you can't weed out the human contribution." James has therefore only to repeat what his *Psychology* had already established, and to point out that "our nouns and adjectives are all humanized heirlooms, and in the theories we build them into, the inner order and arrangement is wholly dictated by human considerations, intellectual consistency being one of them. Mathematics and logic themselves are fermenting with human rearrangements: physics, astronomy, and biology follow massive cues of preference. We plunge forward into the field of fresh experience with the beliefs our ancestors and we have made already; these determine what we notice; what we notice determines what we do; what we do again determines what we experience; so from one thing to another, although the stubborn fact remains that there *is* a sensible flux, what is *true of it* seems from first to last to be largely a matter of our own creation." \*

Nothing of all this can be denied by Idealists. Only, what James, in common with the man of

\* *Pragmatism*, p. 254 f.

action and the scientist, calls 'truth,' the Idealist insists on calling 'illusion'—precisely because it is the embodiment of characteristically *human* aims and achievements. James's contention, on the other hand, is that there is nothing in the 'nature of truth' that compels us to keep 'truth' as a name for something that *we* can *ex hypothesi* never know. In his view, to be verified by man is the essential function of truth, in the only sense in which truth can be an object of man's rational desire. What is in essence incapable of entering the human consciousness can have for us no truth nor even meaning. *“True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify. False ideas are those that we can not.”* That is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that, therefore, is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known-as.” \*

This pragmatic view has been denounced by Idealists, almost in the same breath, as being both purely commercial and purely sceptical. The reader must judge for himself as to which of the two opposing theories of Absolutism and Humanism best deserves the name of Scepticism; as also whether the two counts of this indictment can be consistently combined by the *soi-disant* believers in

\* *Pragmatism*, p. 201.

the 'perfect coherence' of truth. And, finally, he should ask himself why a doctrine which maintains, as Humanism maintains against Absolutism, that human ideals must really count in the making of reality, is regarded as low and spiritually degrading. Is it not, rather, clear that Humanism, by questioning the absolutist notion of 'truth,' and breaking down the distinction between 'theory' and 'practice,' vindicates the reality of that whole world of life and action which Absolutism had contemptuously dismissed as 'mere appearance'? Which is in truth the nobler destiny—to take an active part in the real shaping of an as yet uncertain future, or to contemplate, at an infinite distance, the Absolute's beatific vision of bogus existence in hallucinatory time?

We can now trace how the pre-Jamesian conception of 'psychology' had played into the hands of Absolutism and Materialism. At first sight it might seem that psychology, with its particular concern, not with the totality of things, but with the 'individual mind,' was naturally apt to supply the pluralistic antidote to the monistic excesses of Absolutism.

And, in fact, for Locke, who was practically the first (since Protagoras) to conceive that the *human understanding* was a worthy subject of human

study, the interest of the study lay in its providing a critical check on the human propensity towards fruitless 'speculation' and meaningless dogmatism. For Locke, psychology and philosophy are truly one. But, unfortunately, Locke, though his aims were avowedly humanistic and practical, fell into the snare of regarding pure *passivity* as the only source for our knowledge of physical reality. When, therefore, Hume showed that sensations, simply as such, could never reveal anything beyond themselves, it seemed an unavoidable conclusion that psychology, at any rate, was restricted to what is purely 'subjective.' As against this pure 'subjectivity,' it became the aim of philosophy to vindicate for its subject-matter an equally pure 'objectivity'—with what result we have already seen.

Thus, for the sake of a sharp distinction between the 'subjective' and the 'objective,' philosophy and psychology were torn apart. Psychology became a 'natural science,' dealing solely with the observable concatenations of 'subjective' phenomena, and loftily forbidden to inquire into their cognitive or practical *value*; while philosophy became so 'objective' as to cease to have any significance whatever for human beings. Through the gap thus artificially created, the whole 'world of practical realities,' in James's phrase, slipped

out of sight and out of mind altogether—so far as either the psychologist or the philosopher was concerned. For the psychologist had become as ambitious in his own way as the philosopher in his, to be 'purely theoretical' and undisturbed in his intellectual contemplation by 'merely practical' considerations. James's philosophic achievement, as has been already said, consists in restoring to us our own world, by conceiving consciousness as essentially a means of action and adaptation.

James started with the *aperçu* that the world of practical realities is what we, as living organisms, are primarily interested in; and his psychological studies, undertaken without any subjectivistic bias, further revealed to him that the most recondite and apparently 'disinterested' theories ultimately derive whatever *meaning* they possess from their applicability to this world. And when once we have got so far, we can hardly avoid taking the decisive step of regarding *successful application within this world of practical realities as the touchstone of truth.* Such is the inner meaning of James's 'pragmatic theory of truth.'

That this theory raises, as well as solves, problems, James was well aware: pragmatism could hardly itself claim exemption from the common lot of man made theories, or spring, incorrigibly

perfect, from its creator's brain. At the same time, before a pragmatist can admit any problem as genuine rather than verbal, he must satisfy himself as to its effective or pragmatic *meaning*. Pragmatism, moreover, alone among philosophies contains within itself the promise and potency of its own development, for it alone refuses to make of knowledge a unique exception to the evolutionary process. This indwelling spirit of pragmatism—this abiding sense of *the progressiveness and human relevance of knowledge*—a sense deeper and wider than any specific doctrine in which it may clothe itself—is what James seems pre-eminently to mean by *Humanism*.

“As I apprehend the movement towards humanism, it is based on no particular discovery or principle that can be driven into one precise formula, which thereupon can be impaled upon a logical skewer. It is much more like one of those secular changes that come upon public opinion over-night, as it were, borne upon tides ‘too full for sound or foam,’ that survive all the crudities and extravagances of their advocates. Such have been the changes from aristocracy to democracy, from classic to romantic taste, from theistic to pantheistic feeling, from static to evolutionary ways of understanding life—changes of which we all

have been spectators. Scholasticism still opposes to such changes the method of confutation by single decisive reasons, showing that the new view involves self-contradiction, or traverses some fundamental principle. This is like stopping a river by planting a stick in the middle of its bed. Round your obstacle flows the water and 'gets there all the same.' In reading [a certain critic], I am not a little reminded of those Catholic writers who refute Darwinism by telling us that higher species cannot come from lower, because *minus nequit gignere plus*, or that the notion of transformation is absurd, for it implies that species tend to their own destruction, and that would violate the principle that every reality tends to persevere in its own shape. The point of view is too myopic, too tight and close to take in the inductive argument. You cannot settle questions of fact by formal logic. . . .

"The one condition of understanding humanism is to become inductive-minded oneself, to drop rigorous definitions, and follow lines of least resistance 'on the whole.' . . . For humanism, conceiving the more 'true' as the more 'satisfactory' (Dewey's term) has to renounce sincerely rectilinear arguments and ancient ideals of rigour and finality. It is in just this temper of renuncia-

tion, so different from that of pyrrhonic scepticism, that the spirit of humanism essentially consists. Satisfactoriness has to be measured by a multitude of standards, of which some, for aught we know, may fail in any given case; and what is 'more' satisfactory than any alternative in sight may to the end be a sum of *pluses* and *minuses*, concerning which we can only trust that by ulterior corrections and improvements a maximum of the one and a minimum of the other may some day be approached. It means a real change of heart, a break with absolutistic hopes [despair, rather, James should have said] when one takes up this view of the conditions of belief."\*

It is in passages like this that James's greatness is displayed. But they reveal his weakness as well as his strength. The complacency with which intellectualists took for granted that their (theoretical) renunciation of all other interests secured to them a monopoly of intellect, the practical emptiness of their 'theoretically' perfect 'systems,' bred in James such a horror of logic-chopping and system-making, that even in the privacy of his own mind he seems to have shrunk from pressing home the dialectical advantage

\* *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 245 f.

secured by his discovery—for such it really was—of the arbitrary and question-begging nature of the antithesis between theory and practice. He took up, instead, the pragmatically magnificent, but formally untenable, position of refusing to bow the knee to a ‘Reason’ which was as much at war with the needs of organic as of moral life. He has left it to his disciples to show that the ‘Logic’ which he contemned was hopelessly vitiated by the intrinsic looseness and incoherence of its thought.\* In any case, a rational reformer can as little hope, and need as little care, to escape the charge of blaspheming Reason, as a religious reformer the charge of blaspheming the Deity. But James’s attempt to avoid verbal disputation by speaking to his adversaries in their own vocabulary only had the effect of still further hardening their hearts and encouraging them in their accusations of irrationalism.†

\* The defects of rationalistic ‘logic’ have now been set out in full in Dr. F. C. S. Schiller’s *Formal Logic*. But the reconstruction of logic on the basis of the principle that ‘meaning lies in application’ owes its inception to Mr. Alfred Sidgwick

† James himself eventually recognized that the mildness of his controversial methods presumed too much alike on the “Christian charity” and the “secular intelligence” of his opponents. See Preface to *The Meaning of Truth*, pp. viii-x.

This rather natural, if also rather unintelligent, misunderstanding does not seem, however, to be the main source of the hatred that James has inspired in professional philosophers. They conceive his philosophy as an attack upon their dignity and status, because it brings philosophy down from the clouds to earth, and places living above 'reflecting'—or, rather, regards reflecting as only one, rather queer, way of living, to be justified ultimately, if at all, only in the degree in which it unifies, not the 'universe,' but human interests and activities. The academic mind will always resent any doubt as to whether the academic life is its own justification, and the 'highest' that any mind can possibly conceive. And to crush such doubts it loves to fashion its Absolute very much in the image of a Professor of Logic.

So the struggle between Humanism and Absolutism is likely to rage for some time yet—in philosophic circles. But outside these the issue cannot be in doubt. The human spirit will never assimilate the abstruse and empty abstractions of which academic philosophy grows ever fonder as it grows more specialized. If, therefore, philosophy refuses to re-humanize itself in the spirit of James, it will deservedly perish from its neglect of human

interests. If 'Logic,' unreformed and unrepentant, insists on severing itself from Life, then Life will gladly let it go. Nor can the kind of 'theory' that claims to be independent of practice with any consistency make complaint if practice retorts by insisting that the independence must be mutual.

