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JUDGING GOD BY “HUMAN” STANDARDS: REFLECTIONS ON WILLIAM JAMES’ *VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE*

Petter Tumulty

Contrary to religious fundamentalism, James insists on judging religion by human standards. Fundamentalists would object on two counts: i) a truly religious person must be willing to sacrifice everything, even reason itself, on the altar of faith; and ii) James reduces religion to a mere conventionalism by presuming to apply to it the very human standards religion itself must judge.

The first response shows piety itself requires the autonomy of reason. The second shows James fully appreciates the critical role religion has played in our social evolution. However, this leads into a paradox, given our first argument, which is resolved if we accept at least the possibility, as James did, of a friendly relation between the divine and the human.

Introduction:

The growth in political influence of religious fundamentalism around the world has added a degree of timeliness to certain timeless issues in the philosophy of religion.¹ I would like to examine certain aspects of the relation between faith and reason that fundamentalism highlights using elements in William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience* (hereafter: *VRE*) as my starting point not only because of James’ special position at the source of the modern science or psychology of religion, but primarily because of my own overall sympathy with his ideas.²

In preparing to address his central concern, the value of religious experience, James devotes the first 13 lectures of *VRE* to answering what he terms the “existential question” by describing varieties of religious phenomena, including his justifiably famous characterizations of the “healthy minded” and the “sick soul.” It is in lecture 14, with the fruits of religion and the saintly character in vivid detail before us that James turns to the fundamental question of value and confronts the problem of what standards are to be used in passing judgment on the significance of religious experience.

James rejects emphatically the use of any *a priori* standard and insists that our approach must be empirical. He develops what he means by an empirical



standard by claiming, in language that strikingly anticipates Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, that "our general philosophic prejudices, our instincts, and our common sense are our only guides" (261).³

James acknowledges that considered abstractly, it may seem to be a logical error to judge a 'god' or religion by the standard of human experience. For, he observes, if there existed a god who required child sacrifice as an expression of absolute obedience or test of faith, then it would appear reasonable to satisfy the god's requirement regardless of our all too human pre-understandings, feelings of revulsion and shared meanings. The objection would continue: only if one has already pre-judged the existence of such a god would the practice of child sacrifice appear unreasonable.

This objection leads James to deepen his account of the empirical standard he employs. He admits to a kind of *a priori* at work in the sense that there are just some types of gods we "peremptorily dismiss." There are gods we consider "beneath us" even if they inspired at one time a type of "holy fear" in the hearts of our ancestors. James insists, however, that the common sense prejudices and instincts that are operative within us are themselves the result of an "empirical evolution." James describes this in terms of "the secular alteration that goes on in the moral and religious tone of men, as their insight into nature and their social arrangements progressively develop" (262). James' general psychological and historical point is that, from the beginning, the character of the god is determined by human needs. James, the pragmatist, insists that we can and do believe only in a god that we can use. "The gods we stand by are the gods we need and can use, the gods whose demands on us are reinforcements of our demands on ourselves and on one another" (264). As our needs "evolve" so do our gods.⁴

While supplying some elaborations and making some qualifications, I would like to explore and to support James' effort to judge god by "human" standards that have changed and developed over time. Such an exploration soon leads to the traditional problem of attempting to reconcile the autonomy of reason with the demands of religious faith. I will limit myself in this paper to the problem as viewed from the perspective of what can be called the "challenge" of the religious "right" or "fundamentalism." I mean by fundamentalism a religious outlook one of whose elements is the systematic and unyielding insistence upon the sacrifice of reason to religious faith.⁵ On this view, any effort on behalf of the autonomy of reason⁶ expresses sinful human pride. I would like to bring out the significance of James' effort by responding to two closely related objections: i) any correct conception of the religious requires the willingness to sacrifice reason on the altar of faith if one is to be an authentically religious person; and ii) James undercuts the role of religion as a "sign of contradiction" and reduces it to a prosaic convention-

alism by limiting our standards of evaluation to “our general philosophic prejudices, our instincts, and our common sense.”

First Objection:

While I will use Kierkegaard to illustrate the first objection, it is a view within the Christian tradition that goes back at least to Tertullian in the second century, and it finds enthusiastic spokesmen in the Middle Ages in St. Bernard, St. Peter Damian, and those among the Franciscans who were called the “Spirituals.”⁷

In *Fear and Trembling* (1843) Kierkegaard (or rather, Johannes de Silentio) seeks among other things to distinguish the ethical person from the truly religious person. It is in this context that Kierkegaard recalls the well known story of God commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (*Genesis*, ch. 22). Abraham serves Kierkegaard as the paradigm of a person of religious faith precisely because his obedience to God knew no human limits, including and especially that of the moral law, a law that, in Kant’s phrase, reason gives to itself. The central idea of the fundamentalist is that absolutely nothing must come between the person striving to be truly religious and God.⁸

This is not a problem James addresses directly since such a “sanguinary deity,” as noted above, is “peremptorily dismissed” as falling below the common sense level of our modern feelings and pre-understandings. As we have seen, James does not so much argue as state that we have always believed in the gods we can use and that a despotic god, however useful to our ancestors, no longer meets our psychological needs as they have currently evolved. However, I believe a more complete and, I hope, interesting argument(s) can be constructed by drawing on various elements in the *VRE* and making explicit some of the relevant constituents within our modern shared pre-understandings.

In his lecture on “Saintliness,” James presents what he claims to be “a certain composite photograph of universal saintliness, the same in all religions...” (220). James describes the first characteristic as a “feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world’s selfish little interests; and a conviction, not merely intellectual, but as it were sensible, of the existence of an Ideal Power.” The second characteristic is a “sense of the friendly continuity of the ideal power with our own life, and a willing self-surrender to its control.”

We find in James’ saint “a willing self-surrender,” but with the crucial addition that the saint believes to be good (and hence ideal) the power to which she surrenders. And it is not logically possible for the standard of judgment used, at least implicitly, by such a person to be the god or the god’s will to whom she would surrender without begging the question of whether she ought to surrender to such a god. This recalls Kant’s point in the *Ground-*

ing for the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) that "Even the Holy One of the gospel must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before he is recognized as such."⁹

A fundamentalist might claim that this response is itself circular. The question concerning authentic religious faith is whether it is appropriate to judge the infinite Creator by His creature's finite (and corrupt) human reason and that question is begged when the person begins by asking whether she *ought* to surrender to Him.

A Jamesian could respond that there is a circularity here but it is not vicious. It comes to no more than maintaining that reason must determine its own limits. So, in this case, when reason presumably is addressed with a command to suspend its operation, or invited to make an act of "willing self-surrender" there is no non-arbitrary alternative to having reason inquire into the legitimacy of the command or invitation. We could understand that the person trying to decide whether to surrender to such a god is in effect asking whether a god is God.¹⁰ (I point out in what immediately follows that according to the mainstream of our tradition the true or legitimate God is both good and wise.)

Whether we turn to the Greek or to the Hebrew sources of the Western Christian tradition, i.e., to Plato or Moses, God is understood to be essentially good, in a sense that includes justice as well as beneficence. We find Plato in the *Republic* censoring the poets precisely because they fail to tell the truth about the gods, viz. that "the god is good in truth and must be so represented."¹¹ And in the Hebrew Scriptures we find the people receiving the Divine Law at Sinai only after *Yahweh* has demonstrated His particular concern for the good of these people by liberating them from their slavery and then feeding them in the desert (*Exodus*, chs. 12-24).¹²

In addition to being good, God is also traditionally understood to be wise. And, reacting to the Enlightenment's excessive attack on authority, Gadamer in *Truth And Method*, has correctly noted the connection between (legitimate) authority and knowledge: authority is not based "on the subjection and abdication of reason but on recognition and knowledge—knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence...."¹³

It is in this sense that the issue is one of reason judging its own limits. Reason, as the faculty of self-awareness, is presumably capable of discovering at least some of the conditions for its proper activity. And certainly one important empirical lesson is the value of the virtue of docility, and at appropriate times the duty of obedience, when before a genuine authority. And if there is a being infinitely surpassing us in wisdom and goodness, then reason could see the obligatory character of following such a being's commands.

An analogy would be the obedience a young child owes to wise and good

parents. (Passages such as *Luke* 11:2 and *Romans* 8:16-17 warrant the appropriateness of such an analogy between the human and the divine for those in the Christian tradition.) John Locke, responding in chapter VI of his *Second Treatise of Government* to absolute monarchists who tried to justify their position by invoking the model of the family, neatly turned the tables by explaining parental authority in terms of the child's future autonomy. In a religious context, a similar point could be made. We owe God obedience for our own sake. (This motive need not be our only one nor is it necessarily incompatible with giving glory to God. It would depend on one's understanding of our relationship with God.) And here we have one of those pragmatic tests upon which James properly insists. If, in the course of following our god, we do not judge ourselves to be growing in wisdom and goodness, then we need to inquire whether we are following the legitimate or true God. Children are obligated to obey their parents only for the sake of their own growth towards maturity. Hence, the obligatory character of the commands of parents or God always depends upon satisfying certain at least implicit validity claims which it must always be open to reason to examine, at least in principle, in order that the authority be judged as legitimate.

Of course, there is no clear and distinct rule to follow in deciding whether it is our conception of God or of the good that needs development. This *type* of ambiguity, which recurs at critical junctures in discussions such as this, the fundamentalist refuses to acknowledge as a possibility by positing a "rigid" conception of "god" which is willfully kept above critique.

Admitting such problems is to begin to understand the full importance of the autonomy of reason.¹⁴ I would want to argue that the only solution is the development of what Aristotle called *phronesis* and Plato termed "philosophical conversation" in the *Republic*. (Also see the interesting point in the *Euthyphro*, 7b-9e.)

To insist on reason judging the limits to its own operation, to raise certain kinds of questions of legitimacy in the face of commands, divine or human, is to appeal to the principle of autonomy. This is one of those quasi-*a priori*s at work in the common sense of the modern world as a result of that "empirical evolution" to which James refers. It also captures a fundamental precondition for a god to relate to persons or communities as persons rather than as objects or slaves. If a god seeks to establish a relationship with us as persons, as in a covenant relation, at the heart of the relation would have to be respect for the autonomy of the individual and the community, in other words, it must be on terms which we can recognize and freely accept upon deliberation, at least in principle. This expresses one of the shortcomings of an Ockhamist understanding of God which focuses on God's infinite power. If power were

the only basis for our obedience to God, our obedience would be a matter of expediency rather than obligation.

More concretely, as James carefully notes in his discussion of the excesses of saintly characteristics, especially the excess of devotion in the fanatic, history (and current events) all too often disclose that it is easier for many human beings to prove their obedience to *their* god even though it requires cruelty to others and even to themselves than to engage in the quest for the god they ought to obey in truth. In fact, the fanatic will often measure the degree of his devotion by the vigilance, determination, and even ingenuity he shows in suppressing any doubts his reason might be tempted to entertain. "Spiritual excitement takes pathological forms," writes James, "whenever other interests are too few and the intellect too narrow" (271).

Of course, the principle of autonomy does *not* imply that we are free to judge any and every aspect of God's activity. There are limits to any human being's competency as the Book of Job or as Christ's rebuke of Peter (*Mark* 8:33) reminds us. However, it is clear that to the extent God can be said to require *legitimately* our faith and our obedience He must make at least an implicit appeal to our reason, to our common understandings of wisdom and goodness. To be truly religious we must serve the true god, which means, among other things, we must always be prepared to inquire upon good reason whether our god is God. *And this God Himself must require of us* to the extent that He can be said to seek to relate to us as persons in truth. This is perhaps why genuine autonomy is an ethical ideal which one could argue is filled with religious significance for the person of mature faith. In fact, if we think in terms of the traditional view of the natural law as the participation/embodiment in the natures of things of the Divine or Eternal Law, and if true autonomy is the undistorted expression of the nature of the human *logos*, then it would not be simply a piece of rhetoric, though to modern ears it most definitely would sound paradoxical, to say that God Himself commands genuine autonomy.

Consider the way Aquinas puts the matter in the *Summa Theologicae*, I-II, Q.XCI, a.2:

"...since all things subject to Divine providence are ruled and measured by the eternal law, in so far as, namely, from its being imprinted on them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends. Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to Divine providence in the most excellent way, in so far as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident both for itself and for others. Therefore it has a share of the Eternal Reason, by which it has a natural inclination to its due act and end; and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law."

Some moderns would see efforts to reconcile any theory of the natural law with autonomy as trying to square the circle. The problem cannot be solved

here, but everything depends on one's understanding of how the rational creature, in Aquinas' words, participates in Divine providence. Perhaps, we are by nature suited to create certain types of meaning, though not every creation possible is compatible with remaining in friendly continuity with the Divine. Using the image of a playwright (with its real limitations), we could say that traditionally the natural law was viewed as a script written by God and "autonomy" in this context was limited to our freedom to follow or not follow the script. In the modern period, with our view of nature and culture radically altered by the natural and human sciences, it becomes possible to conceive of our participation in providence in the manner of sharing with God the role of playwright, and hence, significantly deepening our understanding of autonomy. The "loss" of a given, determinate "script" to follow which is the necessary result of the struggle against naive consciousness (and false or ungodly gods) does raise the specter of nihilism, but may also be a constitutive element in the invitation to participate in life as a meaning-giver. But again, not all meaning-creations are compatible with remaining in friendly continuity with the Divine.

Second Objection:

Our fundamentalist critic might respond by gently observing that we should not confuse fundamentalism and fanaticism; they need not be the same thing. The twentieth century has produced a bumper crop of secular fanatics like Stalin and Pol Pot. He would also firmly but quietly insist that much of what has been said still begs the question. The claim that reason must be the judge of its own limits, the appeal to autonomy is not a way to justify James' appeal to human standards in judging religion but rather the Enlightenment version of precisely that same appeal.¹⁵ And he might conclude by making some points of his own: by using human standards to judge religion, hasn't James effectively removed those standards from criticism by religion? James' position implies that religion either supports our standards or is dismissed by those same standards as "beneath us."¹⁶ This closes off what many, and not just fundamentalists, would consider to be one of the major historical sources for reason's own development. Doesn't a position like James' reduce religion to a form of conventionalism merely blessing the status quo? Of course, this is our second objection and James' own language would seem to reinforce the concern expressed when he claims that our only guide is "our general philosophic prejudices, our instincts, and our common sense." In addition, as we saw above, when James first introduces the idea of the empirical evolution of the standards of human reason he writes as if it were an entirely *secular* process.

We can begin building a response in defense of James by observing that in reality James does emphasize the essential and vital role which saints have

had and continue to have in moving forward that "empirical evolution" of a society's common sense (esp. 283-85; 295-97) in the course of his discussion of "The Value of Saintliness" (lects. 14-15). As he develops his argument it is clear that James sees the importance of religion for human life precisely in its ability to challenge the status quo. For instance, in speaking of the saint's charity and non-resistance James says: "He is an effective ferment of goodness, a slow transmuter of the earthly into a more heavenly order" (285). And when he compares the saint with the Nietzschean strong man (293-297), James declares the saint to be the higher type of man, at least in the abstract, "because he is adapted to the highest society conceivable, whether that society ever be concretely possible or not" (296). James is very much aware of the saint's role as a sign of contradiction to the world, and his final evaluation of the positive worth of religion for human life is based in large measure on that role.

Considering passages such as these, a critic might be persuaded that James does not intend to reduce religion to a form of conventionalism. But the response raises another question. Is there no paradox in insisting on employing human standards to evaluate religion and then to arrive at a strong affirmation of religion's value based essentially upon religion's role in elevating those same standards of humanity? Is the question being begged? How can one judge religion by standards already affected (infected?) by religion?

James does not address this, not because he is oblivious to some possible flaw in his argument, but rather, because the paradox is a natural result of his own beliefs concerning the reality of the divine, our friendly continuity with this ideal power and the nature of a perfect society as a community of friends. This last claim is a central part of his argument on behalf of the saint against the Nietzschean strong man (296).

If we draw upon Aristotle's account of friendship we may be able to clarify the situation.¹⁷ Certainly, we are capable of and do evaluate, however fallibly, the various kinds of relationships into which we enter. In those relationships which Aristotle would term "friendship of utility," the standard of evaluation would be a cluster of efficiency considerations which are extrinsic to the selves involved, i.e., the relationship is impersonal. Also, in such relationships, we recognize the interest that the agent with whom we are dealing has in influencing our standard(s) by defining our needs for us, e.g., advertising. In this context of utility relations it is critical from our own perspective that the standard we use actually be our own and not that of the other. In fact, to the extent that our standard has been tampered with by the other without our understanding and agreement we have been manipulated and treated as a means rather than respected as an end by the other.

However, the situation is radically different in the case of what we can call perfect or genuine friendship. The relationship is by its very nature personal

in the sense that the character and being of the selves involved are at the center of the relation. In such cases, the standard of evaluation of the relationship, like the relationship itself, is intrinsic to the self. When we are evaluating relationships of this particular kind it is not possible to employ a standard that is simply our own without qualification in contrast with that of the other. The friend is "another self."

The question such an evaluation poses is precisely whether we can affirm upon reflection the developments in our selves, and our standards, brought about by our sharing our lives with our friends. And what better basis for affirming the value of our friends than that they have empowered us to live more meaningful lives in accordance with higher standards? It may be paradoxical, but we use our standards to evaluate our friends. And our most significant friends are those who have elevated our standards and ourselves. Those of whom we can approve upon reflection and to whom we are most grateful are the ones who refused to allow us to "lie in spiritual stagnancy." Our dearest friends are "vivifiers and animators of potentialities of goodness which but for them would lie forever dormant [in us]..." (284). Such evaluations are difficult, and we are subject to error from a number of causes. And we can often learn from such errors. Most certainly we do not make such judgments from some a-historical, absolute standpoint. But we can, and, in fact, as a practical necessity, must make them.

Admittedly, the situation is more complicated when the one extending friendship to us is our superior in goodness and wisdom. Such spiritual realities as "authority," "commands," "obedience" and "faith" grow in significance with the distance between ourselves and the friend. The obvious, though not simple, empirical example, already mentioned above, is the relation between the parent and the child. In the beginning, the child is not capable of recognizing its needs. However, the central fact in determining what needs to be done is the child herself, with her capacity to grow in wisdom and the virtues. And this necessarily means developing the genuine autonomy of the child. It is only in and through that development that the child can come to understand what it is to be a person, the true sense in which its friend over the years has been a friend, and so how she too can be a true friend with, if necessary, a legitimate claim to authority and faith.

Also, such a person will have come to understand why, if the saint is correct about the existence of a being who infinitely surpasses us in wisdom and goodness, and the possibility of our entering into "friendly continuity" with it, such a being would have endowed us with reason, a capacity for autonomy in the first place, and extended an invitation that unavoidably makes an appeal to our faith to begin an eternal journey with our friend across the infinite distance to our friend. Such a faith, far from seeing autonomy as a threat or temptation, would view the development of autonomy as a religious vocation

as well as a moral obligation. And, as the argument in *VRE* attempts to establish, reason could view such a faith as a vital ally in the disenchanting world of modernity.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, we have examined two related objections from the religious "right" or fundamentalism to James' effort in *VRE* to evaluate religion according to human standards. Of course, answering the religious right is only one part of the effort to articulate within modern culture a persuasive religious humanism.

However, I believe philosophers like William James can help us to see how truly ungodlike the god of fundamentalism really is. To serve the true God we must criticize the "idols of our tribe" using as our pragmatic standard their usefulness in developing, or even liberating, what is best in ourselves. "The tree can be told by its fruit" (*Mt. 12:34*). And again, "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full" (*Jn. 10:10*).

"The whole drift of my education goes to persuade me that the world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds that exist...[and] By being faithful in my poor measure to this over-belief, I seem to myself to keep more sane and true" (401). James closes the *VRE* asking whether it might not be of use to God in carrying out His own greater tasks to have individuals like ourselves faithfully living in accordance with our own over-beliefs.

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NOTES

1. I would like to thank for their many helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper: Paul Santilli of Siena College and my colleagues at St. Michael's College, Terence Tilley of the Religious Studies Dept. and Fr. Richard VanderWeel, S.S.E., of the Philosophy Dept.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the members of the Northern New England Philosophy Association (NNEPA) and participants at the sixteenth annual meeting of the association held at St. Anselm College where the paper was read.

2. William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Collier Books, 1961). I will identify all quotes from *VRE* simply by giving the page(s) in parentheses in the body of the text.

3. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth And Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), pp. 235-74.

As explained in the previous note, the page number provided in parentheses in the body of the text is for *VRE*.

4. Richard Bernstein, in distinguishing various senses of "practical," has observed how the critics always seemed to give the worst possible interpretation to terms like "work" or

"use" in the writings of the Pragmatists. See his account of *praxis* in *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), esp. pp. X and 173.

Another, not entirely unrelated point, is to observe the peculiarity of those type of objections to religion based on the "discovery" of certain human needs that the gods fulfill. One can understand the claim that given the human condition, if the gods did not exist we would have to invent them. But this is an insight into (alienated) human nature and not an argument against the gods' existence. Our need for the gods is ambiguous with respect to their actual existence.

A last point for this note concerns James' use of the term "evolve" in this context. James is not saying that our standards change in some mindless way according to the blind workings of Darwinian mechanisms of variation and natural selection. I take it that is precisely the force of his reference to our *growing insight* into the nature of the world and society, in the quote given above, as the basis for the development of our standards.

See Richard Bernstein's *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), pp. 66-69, for a brief statement of the issues involved in making sense of the development or evolution of standards.

5. This characterization may be inadequate beyond the limited purposes of this paper. It may be a mistake in other contexts not to carefully distinguish among fundamentalists, anti-intellectualists, fideists and those who might be called irrationalists.

Also, those who limit the meaning of "fundamentalism" to a certain approach to sacred writings, whether the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, the Koran, etc. may feel that I am still mis-describing my target. However, the "religious" call for the sacrifice of reason in this context is simply embodied in the systematic suppression or ignoring of historical-critical studies applied to the particular tradition's sacred text(s). In the Roman Catholic tradition the barriers to such studies began to come down with Pope Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943).

6. I mean by "autonomy" to include more than simply negative freedom. It includes positive notions of self-expression, as well as rights of non-interference, which will require certain types of appropriate dependencies.

7. Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation In The Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), pp. 8 & 12-13.

8. In fairness to Kierkegaard, and the complexity of the issues involved, it should be noted that the concept of reason he opposes is that of Hegel, as Kierkegaard interprets him. However, on anyone's interpretation, Hegel does subordinate religion to philosophy.

Perhaps, Kierkegaard's intention in focusing on the Abraham story is shaped in part by a desire to counter explicitly the growing trend toward subordinating religion (Christianity) to practical reason (ethics). This is the theme in such influential works as Gotthold Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* (1779) and Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793).

9. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), trans. James W. Ellington, p. 21 (p. 408 in the Academy edition).

10. John Locke raises the same issue in his criticism of the "Enthusiasts": *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. IV, ch. XIX, sec. 10.

11. Plato, *Plato's Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1974) trans. by G. M. A. Grube, p. 49 (p. 379 in the Stephanus edition).

12. In the case of Plato it is clear that the sense of "good" is moral. Perhaps it is not so clear in the case of *Exodus*. One could keep a covenant out of narrow self-interest or gratitude for the promotion of private and/or sectarian interests. However, in other parts of scripture, such as the psalms and the writings of the prophets, it is clear that God is essentially concerned with justice.

13. *Truth and Method*, p. 248. Gadamer continues: "Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to a command. Indeed, authority has nothing to do with obedience, but rather with knowledge."

14. This also captures the basic reason why Kierkegaard felt that Hegelian rationalism was an illusion. Kierkegaard was right in seeing "anxiety" as an inescapable part of the human condition which we are constantly trying to escape.

(I do mean to assert intrinsic relations between the Platonic idea of dialectic, the Aristotelian idea of *phronesis*, the Kantian idea of autonomy and the Kierkegaardian idea of "anxiety.")

Also, see note 15.

15. I believe the objection must be granted, at least in the limited sense that there is no neutral, objective, sufficiently determinate standard to which one can appeal to decide the argument between the fundamentalist and the philosopher; hence, this type of objection would apply to *both* disputants. So, is there an "argument"? Yes. But not the kind that can be settled by the application of an impersonal system of deductive or inductive rules by a formally competent subject. It is the most interesting type of argument precisely because its solution cannot be detached from the way the subject chooses to define herself, and partially determines the type of relations into which she can enter. (I am reminded of Plato's discussions in the *Republic* of types of character and, of course, of Kierkegaard's stages and his notion of truth as subjectivity.)

It is a mistake, common enough, to view any commitment to autonomy as subordinating faith to reason. However, the life of reason, the human *logos*, manifestly requires faith; and the development of faith requires reason. All of which is given concrete historical meaning only in a community that is the bearer of a living religious tradition.

16. The problem posed can be developed in a "stronger" or a "weaker" form. In the text I lay out the "weaker" formulation, in the sense that given a choice between two competing standards as to which one should be primary James allegedly makes the wrong choice as shown by the historical record. In this note I will briefly address the "stronger" objection based on the religious belief that "natural" human reason is so corrupt as to constitute no standard at all.

A fairly typical fundamentalist could state the objection in terms of the radical corruption of human nature since Adam's fall and the consequent darkening of human reason. Any attempt by reason to assert autonomy is but an expression of its sinful nature. For us to be "saved," as defined by the particular religion of the fundamentalist, we have to submit unconditionally and unquestioningly to the divinity or its "mouthpiece" on earth. A great

deal of intellectual activity becomes possible, and even encouraged, *after* such a submission and *within* the religion's paradigm, in a Kuhnian sense. This is why fundamentalists cannot be simply identified with anti-intellectualists. Unless one stipulates that one of the defining marks of the intellectual is autonomy.

This radical attack on reason has its secular analogies, e.g., in the marxist theory of ideology. However, it raises similar epistemological problems. The radical critic, secular or religious, reduces the strength of her own possible arguments which seek to distinguish between ideology and critique, between the angel of darkness and the angel of light in direct proportion to the degree of corruption of reason alleged. And those who leave the drawing of such distinctions in the hands of an "authority" fail, as we noted above, to understand the nature of authority and its dependence on the satisfaction of certain validity claims.

Perhaps it is not inappropriate to add in the spirit of James' empiricism and Gadamer's "ontological" hermeneutics that nurturing the capacity to effectively question authority is itself an achievement, and even task, of legitimate authority, and hence, one of its concrete, historical fruits.

17. Those familiar with Aristotle's discussion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* will also recall his claim in ch. 7 of Bk. VIII that friendship between the gods and human beings is not possible.

The situation is once again ambiguous. On the other hand, the "Jamesian saint" might appreciate Aristotle's reasoning, but she would claim that her "experience," like that of the physicist's vacuum or impetus, simply refutes it. (James develops the parallel between scientific and religious thought, pp. 107-111.) However coherent and comprehensive the Aristotelian system may be it is not sufficient to make sense of the saint's experience. (Recall the second characteristic of "universal saintliness" in the text above.) On the other hand, the Aristotelian countercharge is that the saint is deluding herself.

In the light of texts like *John* 15:12-17, Christians would resolve the ambiguity in favor of the saint.