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# The Origin of Pragmatism in William James

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THE ORIGIN OF PRAGMATISM  
IN WILLIAM JAMES

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
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## VITA AUCTORIS

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## CHAPTER I

### THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF WILLIAM JAMES

#### 1. Problem of the origin of Pragmatism in William James.--

Twentieth-century America is the seat and stronghold of the philosophical movement called Pragmatism, which in the last forty years has come to pervade the political, social, and moral life of our country, and is now the most prevalent philosophical teaching in American universities. This thesis is concerned with one of the founders and leading exponents of American Pragmatism, William James, who launched the movement in 1907 and gave the basic pragmatic truth-formula its most attractive expression. The specific problem is to determine what influenced James when he formulated Pragmatism. Since the aim of this study is to show the origin of Pragmatism in the mind of William James, the first chapter is devoted to the life and character of the man himself, with particular emphasis given to the development of his intellectual life and his general intellectual background.

2. From a wealthy social and literary family.--The James family stems from the dynamic William James of Albany who emigrated from Ireland (probably in 1789), married three wives, had fourteen children, and made a fortune of \$3,000,000. His

great fortune was derived from various enterprises in merchandising, commerce, real estate, banking, and public utilities, ranging over a broad area from Canada to New York City. In 1832 William James of Albany died, just ten years before the birth of his illustrious grandson. William James's children inherited the bulk of his large fortune, and they gave themselves to the leisurely cultivation of taste and the pursuit of letters. In this way they became largely a social and literary family.<sup>1</sup> As his son, Henry,<sup>2</sup> later wrote, "We were never in a single case, I think, for two generations, guilty of a stroke of business."<sup>3</sup>

3. William James grows to maturity in an intellectual atmosphere.--William James, the future psychologist, was born in 1842 in New York City. He grew up in an intellectual atmosphere and was introduced at an early age to the ebb and flow of ideas. His father, Henry James the elder, lived a life of travel, study, philosophical meditation, writing, and

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1 Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Little, Brown, and Co., Boston, 1935, I, 1-6. Most of the biographical data of William James and his family has been taken from this two volume work by Perry. General page references touching biographical details will frequently be made to this basic source of information on William James.

2 One of the fourteen children of William James of Albany was Henry James. He, in turn, had two sons: William the psychologist (b. 1842) and Henry the novelist (b. 1843), and a daughter Alice (b. 1848).

3 R. B. Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, I, 6. Quoted by Perry and taken from Henry James, A Small Boy and Others, 1913, 190.

public lectures. No recognized profession summoned him away from home to an office routine. Due to his literary activity, there was about the James household an atmosphere "of something perpetually fine going on."<sup>4</sup> He believed in the liberty of his children and in the free absorption of what is best in life, along Platonic educational lines:

"I desire my child to become an upright man, a man in whom goodness shall be induced, not by mere mercenary motive as brute goodness is induced, but by love for it or a sympathetic delight in it. And inasmuch as I know that this character or disposition cannot be forcibly imposed upon him, but must be readily assumed, I surround him as far as possible with an atmosphere of freedom."<sup>5</sup>

Thus in the James household the children were singularly free from parental and institutional authority. The father would propound some provocative idea and throw it into the midst of his brood in order that they might sharpen their teeth on it and, in their eagerness to refute him or one another, exercise themselves in the art of combative thinking. The father was an inveterate critic, both of men and ideas; criticism pervaded his talk, and analysis was second nature to him; he had emphatic, startling, not to say sensational, opinions on any topic that arose. He believed that "truth is essentially combative"<sup>6</sup>

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4 Ibid., I, 64-80.

5 Ibid., I, 170. Quoted by Perry from Henry James, The Nature of Evil, 1855, 99.

6 Ibid., I, 131. Quoted by Perry from Henry James, The Church of Christ Not an Ecclesiasticism, 1854, 3.

and nothing pleased him like exploding the bubbles of conventional dignity.<sup>7</sup>

4. Henry James's attitudes on truth, belief, morals and religion.--Along intellectual and religious lines, Henry James had a constitutional distaste for orthodoxy. One could spoil a good thing for him by converting it into an institution. As soon as ideas became established, or were proclaimed with unction and an air of authority, they became repugnant. Henry James repudiated the orthodox Calvinism of his father, the dynamic William James of Albany, and sought his great sources of religious light in Swedenborg and Fourier. He occasionally lectured on these men and on the social and political conditions of the times, and tended to apply recondite truths to concrete questions of the day, ignoring the practical difficulties involved. His mode of thought was by intuition and personal conviction, and he believed in believing; he did not earn his beliefs, but freely helped himself to them. Religion, for him, was a matter of experience and insight, and not of dogma, historical revelation, or institutional religion.<sup>8</sup> He was an anti-moralist in theory: "Morality is essentially self-approbation";<sup>9</sup> but in practice he led a moral life of refine-

7 Ibid., I, 104-124, 125-145.

8 Ibid., I, 3-19, 20-38, 146-166.

9 Ibid., I, 157. Quoted by Perry from Henry James, Substance and Shadow, 1863, 148-9.



ment and culture. His fundamental ideas on belief and on truth are summed up in the following:

"For he is likelier to prove a wise man in the long run, whose negations are fed by his beliefs, than he whose beliefs are starved by his negations. . . Truth how imperfectly known at best! The deepest truth has to be lived and can never be adequately thought. Truth is revealed to the heart. It cannot be reasoned into a man, but, being revealed, is freely and lovingly adopted."<sup>10</sup>

Henry James cultivated his own personal religious experience of a life shot through with the support of Divine Providence; as a result, he died a very spiritual and peaceful death, markedly confident in his after-life with God. The children were unreceptive or even indifferent to "father's ideas," and knew little of what was written in his books, but they "felt the side-wind of their strong composition."<sup>11</sup> The impracticalness of Henry James's solution to real problems of this world tended to reduce his books and lectures to failure. William James edited The Literary Remains of the Late Henry James, and in six months it sold but a few copies.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, there remained with William the sense of his father's inward greatness, and on the other hand, the knowledge of what small real effect was made on the world by his ideas.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., I, 146. Quoted by Perry from Henry James, Substance and Shadow, 445 and "Faith and Science," North American Review, CII, 1865, 369.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., I, 125 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., I, 396.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., I, 114-115.

5. Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne stroll about the house.--

Above all, the Henry James family thrived on social and literary activity. About the borders of the family dinner table, from time to time, were seated the familiar literary figures and sages of the day. Henry James was himself an excellent writer and his closest friends were contemporary literateurs. His was ever a searching, critical intelligence that appreciated men and their ideas with outspoken honesty. He belonged to the circle of the Harbinger,<sup>14</sup> and was on intimate terms with John S. Dwight, Albert Brisbane, Horace Greeley, William H. Channing, and James Russell Lowell. He was also one of the inner circle of the Transcendentalists of Brook Farm, numbering among his friends Nathaniel Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott, Orestes Bronson, and David Thoreau. Emerson, Thoreau, Wilkinson, and Bronson were ever familiar personages strolling about the James household, and with these men Henry James carried on heated table discussions on all varieties of literature, politics, and philosophy. Lectures brought Emerson intermittently to New York and he became a frequent visitor at the James house.<sup>15</sup> The literary style, the robust laughter and explosive emotionality of Henry James, his critical intelligence and the general intellectual atmos-

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14 Famous weekly magazine, begun in 1845, edited by George Ripley, and "devoted to the principle of universal unity as taught by Charles Fourier."

15 R. B. Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, I, 39-63, 64-79.

phere of the family, are found in this passage, in which he characterized an early visit of his new acquaintance, Waldo Emerson:

"Good heavens! how soothed and comforted I was by the innocent lovely look of my new acquaintance, by his tender courtesy, his generous laudatory appreciation of my crude literary ventures! And how I used to lock myself up with him in my bedroom, swearing that before the door was opened I would arrive at the secret of his immense superiority to the common herd of literary men! I might just as well have locked myself up with a handful of diamonds, so far as any capacity of self-cognizance existed in him . . . On the whole, I may say that at first I was greatly disappointed in him, because his intellect never kept the promise which his lovely face and manners held out to me. He was to my senses a literal divine presence in the house with me; and we cannot recognize literal divine presences in our houses without feeling sure that they will be able to say something of critical importance to one's intellect. It turned out that any average old dame in a horse car would have satisfied my intellectual rapacity just as well as Emerson . . . No man could look at him speaking (or when he was silent either, for that matter) without having a vision of the divinest beauty. But when you went to him to hold discourse, you found him absolutely destitute of reflective power."<sup>16</sup>

This is the reaction of the young novelist-to-be, Henry James junior, age twelve, to Emerson's presence in the household:

"I visualize at any rate the winter firelight of our back-parlour at dusk and the great Emerson--I knew he was great, greater than any of his friends--sitting in it between my parents, before the lamps had been lighted,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., I, 43. Quoted by Perry from William James, The Literary Remains of the Late Henry James, 296-7, 300.

as a visitor consentingly housed only could have done, and affecting me the more as an apparition, sinuously and, I held, elegantly slim, benevolently aquiline, and commanding a tone alien, beautifully alien, to any we heard round-about."<sup>17</sup>

Style and talk in this family were a vocation, the very atmosphere of the household. As a result, father and sons all had excellent writing styles and singular command of language. William James, in view of the constant flow of provocative ideas in the family circle, was later to write to his father, "All my intellectual life I derive from you."<sup>18</sup> Still later, at his father's death William wrote:

"For me, the humor, the good spirits, the humanity, the faith in the divine, and the sense of his right to have a say about the deepest reasons of the universe, are what will stay by me."<sup>19</sup>

This insistence on having his own personal "say about the universe" is one of the profoundest motives of William James's thinking. Many germs of a fertile intellectual life were planted here in the James household.

6. Henry the novelist and William the scientist.--One year after the birth of William James in 1842, Henry James, the future novelist, appeared on the scene. Both these boys

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., I, 44. Quoted by Perry from Henry James, Notes of a Son and Brother, N.Y., 1914, 204.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., I, 130.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., I, 152. Quoted by Perry from Henry James, Letters of William James, Atlantic Monthly Press, Boston, 1920, I, 221.

had definite temperaments. Henry's was an aesthetic mind, William's, scientific and philosophical. William was both restless and radical, "like a blob of mercury"; Henry was more circumspect. Although there was only a year's difference of age between them, William was definitely "the big brother"; it was a temporal quality or tempo. William conducted himself in the family circle with his usual high spirits; he was more vividly bright than his brother, more daring and prompter to respond; he was more witty and tended to hold the center of the stage, the younger brother taking his place among those who laughed. Laughter was a very important element in the family life, and William, next after his father, was its most copious source. Henry was not as fond of study, properly so-called, as of reading; he was a devourer of libraries, and a voluminous writer of novels and dramas. William, on the other hand, was an admirable young student, ever full of merriment, even though he discoursed on difficult subjects such as Schopenhauer and Renan. He seemed equal to anything, and carried it off with élan. Henry engaged in literary and dramatic composition from childhood, just as William engaged in juvenile forms of science and art.<sup>20</sup>

7. William absorbs basic attitudes towards life.--

William James resembled his father in many traits. Both were warm-blooded, effervescent, and tenderly affectionate, and

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., I, 173-189.

both were unstable and impatient. Neither had a very large capacity for laborious routine. They were fond of spontaneity in word and action, and had a tendency toward embellishment and immoderate affirmation. But while the father was markedly robust, the son was relatively frail with long periods of bodily disability and neurasthenia. William James, however, had a scientific temper of mind. He did not readily accept his father's unsupported beliefs, nor did he accept his father's mysticism which took him away from the real world and the concrete difficulties attending his ideas.<sup>21</sup> Though not readily absorbing his father's ideas, he did absorb many basic attitudes towards life, many mental traits, and trends of thought. Not a little of his father's attitude toward religion as a matter of experience and insight, and not of dogma or historical revelation, registered in him and stayed with him throughout life. In William is found the father's distaste for orthodoxy, and the tendency to champion the weak and assail the strong. His father's dictum: "The deepest truth has to be lived and can never be adequately thought or reasoned into a man; truth is revealed to the heart," can be taken as a possible early germ of William James's empirical and experiential attitude in philosophy and religion. His Pragmatism, wherein one idea challenges another in verification, embodies a notion

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., I, 146-166.

similar to his father's principle: "Truth is essentially combative." The atmosphere of liberty and intellectual unorthodoxy that pervaded the James household,<sup>22</sup> became characteristic of James's free and open frame of mind in philosophy. Life in the family circle made William James even more mundane than his father, more highly socialized, and he had more of what men call "taste." He knew instinctively how to meet the world on its own terms, and how to make himself understood, and how to be free and spirited without ever transgressing the accepted norms of convention or polite intercourse.<sup>23</sup> His was to be a life of great friendships and voluminous correspondence like his father's. From his parents and their refinement he learned instinctively to live a moral life. Following no institutional religion of his own, William James was yet convinced of the reality of his father's religious experiences; throughout his life he never doubted personal religious experience.

8. Linguistic and observational training abroad.--The education of William and Henry James proceeded along three major lines: the family circle, European schooling, and travel. Outside the family circle, the formal education of Henry and William was irregular, and did not conform to the Boston and Cambridge traditional method. Both suffered from a lack of

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22 Ibid., I, 170-171.

23 Ibid., I, 129.

orderly and consecutive education, though both profited by their linguistic and observational training derived from travel. Travel was a fundamental fact in the history of the James family. It was habitually resorted to as a means of education for the young and as a remedy for the old, whatever their affliction, whether of mind or body. It was the father's express purpose "to go to foreign parts and educate the babies in strange lingo." <sup>24</sup> Accordingly, at two years of age William went to Europe and stayed for two years. Three years were later spent in a school in New York. At the age of thirteen, William again traveled to Europe, and had tutorial training in England and France for three years, mainly in London and Paris. A period of a year or so was spent in a Swiss school, and from there William and Henry traveled through Lyons to Paris for a winter, where they enjoyed the treasures of the Louvre and Luxembourg. <sup>25</sup> At sixteen William was attending a local college at Boulogne. Because he had sketched and painted from boyhood and was seriously considering painting as his vocation, he took a course or two at Bonn in this rather vague process of picking up an education. In his seventeenth and eighteenth years he was tutored in Switzerland and Germany. He then returned to America for a year of painting with W. H. Hunt at Newport, Rhode Island. <sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., I, 169.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., I, 169-189.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., I, 190-201.



9. Result of travel abroad.--Out of this rather complex educational process involving the family circle, travel, and European tutorial schooling in England, France, Germany, and Switzerland, emerged two highly individualized human products. European travel at an early age gave William James largely an observational training and an early introduction to, and gradual mastery of European languages at first hand. During these years William and Henry were constantly observing and writing about national traits and characteristics among the French, German, English, Italian, and Swiss. The very difficulty of judging the genius of a people seems to have fascinated them, and they returned to the task again and again. Gradually, they came to know Europeans and their various temperaments quite well. Later, Henry came to be called "the international novelist" because of his international plots, and William developed a life-long passion for studying psychological traits and psychic states of mind. At eighteen years of age, the sum of William's learning embraced a good knowledge of French, some German and Latin, mathematics through trigonometry, and scattered bits of science.<sup>27</sup>

10. William abandons painting for science.--At this period William James had gifts which seemed to qualify him to be an artist. The frequent contact with natural scenery

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., I, 169-189.

through travel and the continuous absorption of culture from the art treasures in Europe and America had developed in him both a broad aesthetic experience and a singular artistic creative power. He saw the landscape with a painter's eye and the artist's sense of plastic form. He had the artist's imagination and an acute perception of sensory qualities. At this time, however, while studying painting under W. H. Hunt at Newport, William decided that he would never be more than a mediocre artist. He therefore abandoned painting for science and philosophy, and began to devote his life to a search for truth.<sup>28</sup>

11. Pursuit of the scientific aspects of medicine.--In 1861 William James entered the Lawrence Scientific School of Harvard University at nineteen years of age. Harvard at that time was most up-to-date in biology; and James pursued a sequence from chemistry to biology to medicine, and read widely in those sciences. He showed a considerable aptitude for observation and the use of instruments, and was given to novel experiments and the internal consumption of chemicals to study their effects. His course of study was very broken because of physical disabilities, and he could do little laboratory work. In all, he put in three years and two months in the study of medicine, and received his M.D. degree from Harvard in 1869. James was interested in the scientific aspects of

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., I, 190-201.

medicine not in the practice of the profession. He wanted to give experiment, observation, and research a trial, if his health would allow it.<sup>29</sup>

12. His scientific training under Agassiz and Wyman.--

Jean Louis Agassiz and Jeffries Wyman, and to a lesser degree C. W. Eliot, were the teachers who counted most during these years, and made William James a scientist. Agassiz was a scientific paragon to James. He formed a scientific conscience in his pupil, and this exercised a constant censorship upon his free speculative turn of mind, and made him seek the concreteness and precision of factual knowledge. From Wyman, James came under the influence of a comprehensive massing and organization of facts and the ideal of scientific objectiveness in observation. The first problem to which he devoted himself systematically was the problem of evolution. When he himself began to teach at Harvard, he drew most heavily upon what he had learned from Wyman. After study under Wyman and Agassiz, James definitely set his heart on a scientific career, with "natural history" as his possible subject.<sup>30</sup>

13. Scientific expedition to Brazil.--In 1865 James went on the Thayer Scientific Expedition to the Amazon River in Brazil which was under the direction of Agassiz. It was a

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29 Ibid., I, 202-216.

30 Ibid., I, 207-216.

period of close association with his personal scientific ideal, and a trial of the career of biology, which, to James, was a live alternative to natural history. James's physical disability cut short his part on the expedition however, and proved to him he was "cut out for a speculative rather than an active life." There was frequent reference to the "sensitivity of his eyes," and he suffered for many years, and intermittently throughout the remainder of his life, from an inability to use his eyes without excessive fatigue.<sup>31</sup>

14. James the voracious reader, incorrigibly vagrant.---

To conceive James during these years as engaged in the study of chemistry, biology, comparative anatomy, or medicine, is to form a very inadequate idea of his intellectual development. His mind was as energetic and acquisitive as it was voracious and incorrigibly vagrant. He ranged over the whole field of literature, history, science, and philosophy, perpetually grazing and ruminating, wandering wherever the pasturage was good. Prolonged application was extremely repugnant to him. The power of his mind lay in its extreme mobility.<sup>32</sup> It was not a mind that remained stationary, drawing all things to itself as a center, but a mind which traveled widely--now here and now there, seeing all things for itself, and seeking in the variety of its adventures what it lacked in

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31 Ibid., I, 217-226.

32 Ibid., I, 206.

profundity. His frequent and unsystematic excursions into other sciences and realms of thought indicated a philosophical bent, and also gave him a broad cosmopolitanism of thought and experience. His health allowed him to do little laboratory work. The fact that he could not endure standing for hours in a laboratory provided a decisive reason against experimental research. There was here, to a certain extent, the negation of science and the hopeful promise of philosophy.<sup>33</sup>

15. Recurrent ill-health and depression from 1867 to 1872.--The state of William James's health had a marked effect on his later philosophy. At twenty-five years of age, he entered upon a period of partial incapacity, physical suffering, and depression which lasted for nearly five years. He traveled to Dresden, Divonne, Berlin, and Teplitz for baths in the hope of curing his ailing back, but they were inefficacious.<sup>34</sup> By nature we have seen that James was neurasthenic, almost always restless and discontented; he was soon sated with whatever he had but remained ever unsatisfied, insatiable rather than replete. Normally, his discontent acted as an excellent irritant to activity and prevented his mind from becoming stagnant. But now the condition of his health undoubtedly contributed much further to his fundamental instability. It is characteristic of his restless spirit to have

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., I, 227-236.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., I, 237-259.

loved Germany, France, England, and Italy each in turn, without definitely adopting any of them. Some other activity, some other science was always needed to furnish a relief from his present discomforts. He found work a cure for too much play, and play a cure for work; primitive nature a cure for social fatigue, and civilization a cure for the emptiness of primitive nature; philosophy a cure for science and science for philosophy; he went to Europe when he suffered from America and sought in America a cure for Europe.<sup>35</sup> Ill health, combined with his ardent and mobile temperament, gave to his life that nostalgic, that darting and oscillating rhythm which is its most unmistakable characteristic. There was a perpetual uprooting and replanting, and he reaped accordingly.

16. Professional expertness and mastery denied him.--

Drill, professional expertness, comprehensive erudition, the systematic and thorough mastery of a branch of knowledge-- these were denied him; and he bitterly deplored the fact. During these years of felt frustration and paralysis of action James still read widely and voluminously as he had always done. In his retreat at Teplitz while seeking a cure by the baths, he enlarged his acquaintance with literature and exercised himself in the art of literary criticism. But it is evident that he was constantly looking for values beyond those of the literary art itself. He read through Browning and

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35 Ibid., I, 177.

Emerson. He then turned to Homer, Renan, Shakespeare, Darwin, Taine, Kant, Agassiz, Janet, Lessing, and the beloved Schiller. It was during the Teplitz and Dresden days of 1868 that James discovered Goethe and found in him that "sturdy realism by which he hoped to steer a middle course between pessimism and supernaturalism."<sup>36</sup> It was the first form of that personal belief which later became his empirical philosophy. He learned to detect in a book or article what he could appropriate quickly. As he read he thought, and as he thought he wrote many pages of analysis and argument, returning again and again to the problem that baffled him.<sup>37</sup>

17. Physiology taken as approach to psychology.--Despite James's indefatigable industry in the midst of his paralysis, he entertained the sincere conviction that he was doing nothing. A partial recovery from time to time would send him off to resume his scientific studies in physiology and the nervous system.<sup>38</sup> While in Europe, James went to Berlin where he attended lectures on physiology by Emil du Bois-Reymond, famous for the "seven riddles of science," and began to entertain the project of approaching psychology from that angle. He decided to go to Heidelberg for more physiology, for "there are two professors there, Helmholtz and a man named Wundt, who are

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36 Ibid., I, 278.

37 Ibid., I, 260-273.

38 Ibid., I, 274.

strong on the physiology of the senses. As a central point of study I imagine that the border ground of physiology and psychology, overlapping both, is as fruitful as any, and I am now working on it."<sup>39</sup> This new enthusiasm reminded him sharply of his limitations:

"Too late! Too late! If I had been drilled further in mathematics, physics, chemistry, logic, and the history of metaphysics, and had established, even if only in my memory, a firm and thoroughly familiar basis of knowledge in all these sciences (like the basis of human anatomy one gets in studying medicine), to which I should involuntarily refer all subsequently acquired facts and thoughts. . . I might be steadily advancing."<sup>40</sup>

Sickness prevented thorough psychological study. When James turned to Heidelberg, he caught only a glimpse of Wundt and Helmholtz, "probably the greatest scientific genius extant notwithstanding."<sup>41</sup>

#### 18. Spiritual depression and frustration of ambition.--

During the autumn and winter of 1869 James's spirit had steadily declined. "I have literally given up all pretence to study or even to serious reading of any kind, and I look on physiology and medicine generally as a dim voice from a by-gone time."<sup>42</sup> This was a momentous period because it marked

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39 Ibid., I, 126-7.

40 Ibid., I, 119-120.

41 Ibid., I, 282.

42 Ibid., I, 359.



the low point of James's depression and the beginning of a permanent improvement. Recurrent ill health and periods of depression did not touch his essential sanity; his nature was too elastic to allow that. It did however, give him a peculiar sympathy for abnormal people, and later inclined him to believe that they were specially chosen for higher religious experiences by entering new fields of consciousness. His depression and inward brooding brought a continuous deepening of his philosophical interest. On Feb. 1, 1870, James at twenty-eight years of age, recorded in his diary:

"Today I about touched bottom, and perceived plainly that I must face the choice with open eyes; shall I frankly throw the moral business overboard, as one unsuited to my innate aptitudes, or shall I follow it, and it alone, making everything else merely stuff for it? I will give the latter alternative a fair trial. Who knows but the moral interest may become developed. . . Hitherto I have tried to fire myself with the moral interest, as an aid in the accomplishing of certain utilitarian ends."<sup>43</sup>

19. Spiritual crisis.--James had no institutional religion, no fundamental attitude by which to orient his life; his ambitions were frustrated by the failure of his health, and as a result he experienced a spiritual crisis. The spiritual crisis was the ebbing of the will to live for lack of a philosophy to live by--a paralysis of action occasioned by a sense

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<sup>43</sup> William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, Longmans, Green, and Co., N.Y., 1902, 160-1.

of human impotence. With all his heroic resolves and pious hopes he felt that "we are nature through and through, that we are wholly conditioned, that not a wiggle of our will happens save as a result of physical laws."<sup>44</sup> These were evident symptoms of his desperate neurasthenic and psychopathic condition during these years.

20. Solution found in Renouvier.--In a letter to his father, James records his reading of Kant in 1868, and the beginning of his acquaintance with the philosophy of Charles Renouvier. In 1870 Renouvier gave James the solution to his crisis: "one needs that 'vigor of will' which springs from the belief in its freedom." It was this which James derived from Renouvier, as he records in his diary, April 30th, 1870:

"I think that yesterday was a crisis in my life. I finished the first part of Renouvier's second Essais and see no reason why his definition of free will --'the sustaining of a thought because I choose to when I might have other thoughts'--need be the definition of an illusion. At any rate, I will assume for the present--until next year--that it is no illusion. My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will."<sup>45</sup>

James felt his old doubts dispelled by a new and revolutionary insight. This "will to believe" was the specific quality of philosophy which his soul-sickness required. Philosophy was never, for James, a detached and dispassionate inquiry into

44 Henry James, Letters of William James, I, 152-3.

45 Ibid., I, 147.

truth; it was his way of life, the equivalent of his religion. To his essentially interested and ardent nature the counsel of passive resignation could never be more than a temporary anaesthetic. He was too sensitive just to ignore physical evil, and too ardent to accept it as inevitable. But extreme optimism was equally as impossible for him as extreme pessimism. No philosophy could possibly suit him that did not candidly recognize and face the dubious fortunes of mankind, and encourage him as a moral individual to buckle on his armor and go forth to battle and win in the world.<sup>46</sup>

21. James goes into action at Harvard.--Renouvier's gospel of belief and action cured James's depression and gave a new meaning to his life. In 1873 he went into action as a teacher, and this tended to stabilize his life, because it gave him a useful and worthwhile outlet for his thought and activity. In that year he became instructor in anatomy and physiology at Harvard. In 1875 he began teaching psychology, and in 1876, three years after his start, he was assistant professor in physiology. In 1880 his interest had shifted and he became assistant professor of philosophy.<sup>47</sup>

22. Stimulating, inspiring teacher, but disorganized.--James was a good teacher because of the manner of man that he was, and not because of any method which he consciously adopt-

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46 Ibid., I, 324, 145.

47 Ibid., I, 333-358, 359-378.

ed. In the classroom he was precisely what he was everywhere else, just as unorganized, just as stimulating and irresistibly charming. His erudition and his bibliographies were not systematic, nor did he regard them as ends in themselves.<sup>48</sup> His peculiar art of teaching sprang not only from the qualities of his temperament and psychological genius, but from a deliberate purpose of which he was conscious as early as 1876, when he said:

"Philosophic study means the habit of always seeing an alternative, of not taking the usual for granted, of making conventionalities fluid again, of imagining foreign states of mind. What doctrines students take from their teachers are of little consequence provided they catch from them the living, philosophical attitude of mind, the independent, personal look at all the data of life, and the eagerness to harmonize them."<sup>49</sup>

This was clearly James's personal creed as a teacher, and by this means he succeeded in developing new philosophical thinkers--Royce, Santayana, Boodin, Perry, Munsterberg--and creative thought among his students. He also exhibited its complementary defects. In 1900 he wrote to one of his former students:

"Let me advise you in your teaching to be as methodical as possible. Let them see the plan of the forest as

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48 Ibid., I, 442-443.

49 William James, "The Teaching of Philosophy in Our Colleges," Nation, XXIII (1876), 178.

well as the individual tree. I find that my incurable disorderliness of method always stood in my way--too incoherent and rambling."<sup>50</sup>

There were unprofitable moments, even unprofitable hours, in James's classes. There were times when he was evidently fumbling. But surviving pupils know that they studied with James, though it may have been fifty years ago. When they describe their impressions they make use of such terms as "crisp," "unexpected," "vivid, active stimulant to independent thinking," "delightful," "alert," "unusual exuberance and enthusiasm," "genuine and sympathetic interest," "brilliancy and originality." As one student put it:

"As I look back upon it, James's course was one of the best I ever had because it brought me into contact with a fertile mind while doing its own thinking, and gave me the stimulus and inspiration of direct contact with a frank, outspoken, honest thinker and charming personality."<sup>51</sup>

The very fact that James had not well organized the course, and that he was perhaps rather bored with the textbook gave him opportunity to show his own personal views in regard to the points discussed, and he took students with him in his thinking. He was refreshingly straightforward and frank; he did not hesitate to express a different view today from what he had expressed yesterday, and to say, perhaps, that yester-

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<sup>50</sup> R. B. Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, I, 443.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., I, 445.

day he was mistaken.

23. He teaches comparative anatomy, physiology, psychology, and philosophy.--Teaching provided James with a variety of activities and permitted a frequent change of scene; at the same time it involved fixed duties from which he derived a sense of stability and usefulness. His profession brought him agreeable and diverse human relations, and a continuous stream of appreciative audiences. Teaching provided him the indispensable social aspect of his scholarly vocation. He enjoyed, loved, stimulated, and sometimes berated his students. But on the whole it was with his teaching as it was with everything else--he soon grew weary of whatever he was doing, and with equal promptness missed it when he gave it up. Physiology, comparative anatomy, psychology, and philosophy all attracted him; and he ended by teaching them all. Both comparative anatomy and human physiology led through the conception of evolution to psychology; while psychology, as James knew it, looked for its casual explanation to physiology and for its deeper implications to a theory of knowledge and metaphysics.<sup>52</sup> Above all, James's teaching secured his continuous growth in competence and in fame.<sup>53</sup>

24. Marriage in 1878.--A second factor that stabilized

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52 Ibid., I, 325.

53 Ibid., I, 379-391.

James's life was his marriage July 10, 1878, to Alice H. Gibbens. Mrs. James was a remarkable woman in her own right, distinguished in beauty, wit, and character. Her benign influence on her husband's happiness and upon the success of his career can scarcely be exaggerated. She shared his intellectual and professional interests with sympathetic loyalty--the "wonted ear into which to pour all my observations, aphorisms, wishes, and complaints."<sup>54</sup> Above all, she introduced into his soul that complementary element of composure which his mobile and high strung nature greatly needed. In marriage itself there was the sense of a safe anchorage and of a steadying purpose in life, giving him as much stability as was consistent with his mercurial genius; directing his super-abundant nervous energy into profitable and productive channels; providing in his own house those tender human relationships, which his nature craved; and giving him at the core of his being the all important sense of living a full and useful life.<sup>55</sup>

25. Writing the source of his power.--One of these productive channels was writing, which became the great source of James's power. In 1878, the same year of his marriage, he published three major articles which indicated that certain of his most fundamental ideas in both psychology and philosophy

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54 Ibid., I, 376.

55 Ibid., I, 375-376.

had already crystallized. In this same year he started his famous treatise on The Principles of Psychology, which was not to be published until twelve years later in 1890. The twenty years from 1890 to 1910 were a period of considerable philosophical and psychological productiveness, resulting in forty-five articles or more, and nine books: The Principles of Psychology, Briefer Course, The Will to Believe, Human Immortality, Talks to Teachers on Psychology, Varieties of Religious Experience, Pragmatism, The Meaning of Truth, and A Pluralistic Universe.<sup>56</sup>

26. The development of his power to write.--In addition to the family circle where literary style and criticism were the very atmosphere of the household, and the influence of the Harbinger writers and the Brook Farm literati who frequently visited the James household, it is noteworthy that William's father, Henry James, was a writer whose extraordinary vigor and picturesqueness gave him one of the best English styles of his day.<sup>57</sup> When William James himself began to experiment with his pen, he wrote reviews and short articles for the Atlantic Monthly, the North American Review, and the Nation; and his career as a writer, like that of his brother, was greatly facilitated by the fact that he lived among the editors and numbered such men as Lowell, Fields, Norton, Godkin, and

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., I, 392, 825.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., I, 125.



Howells among his friends. He read and re-read Emerson and Carlyle during his most impressionistic period in forming his style. He seemed to get little philosophy from them, but rather precepts, brilliant epithets, and apt quotations. He read through Emerson two or three times; the heat which he missed in Emerson he found in Carlyle.<sup>58</sup>

27. His philosophical writing.--James presented philosophy in the form of literature. His aim was to search for truth and use style as a vehicle of ideas. Accordingly, he cultivated style in his scientific and philosophical writing and was offended by its absence in others. James was a "talking writer" with a genius for picturesque epithets, together with a tendency to vivid coloring and extreme freedom of manner. He had an artist's feeling for form, and an acute power of sense perception. He also allowed himself the artist's license; when a theme took him, it possessed him. His descriptions of people were, like his father's, portraits in which he expressed some tonality or nuance of life which the subject conveyed to him. He indulged his moods because they were intuitive and his playfulness because it was creative. He had a singular and perhaps unmatched genius in catching in words the fleeting, evanescent moments of various states of consciousness. He wrote primarily to express convictions, and this gave the result a peculiar quality of sincerity.

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58 Ibid., I, 260-273.

28. Personal friendships with the best scientific minds.--

As his fame and competence grew, James frequently visited Europe and mingled with the best scientific minds of his day. He visited Joseph Delboeuf, the Belgian psycho-physicist and philologist; and he returned to Germany where he made the acquaintance of the physicist and philosopher, Ernst Mach, and also laid the foundations of an enduring friendship with the psychologist, "the good and sharp-nosed Stumpf." Other close friends of James included Oliver Wendell Holmes, George Santayana, George H. Palmer, Hugo Munsterberg, George Howison, Charles Peirce, Josiah Royce, Ralph Barton Perry, Shadworth Hodgson, Charles Renouvier, and Henri Bergson.<sup>59</sup> He was too intensely personal ever to divorce a man's ideas from the man himself. It was characteristic of him to acquire an author's photograph as well as his books, and to attempt by correspondence or by immediate contact to convert a relation of ideas into a relation of men.

29. Most influential American thinker of his day.--In

this way, James was able to play that important role for which his early training, as well as his personal traits, so admirably fitted him: ambassador of American thought and international messenger of good will to the countries of Western Europe. His command of French and German, his witty and entertaining talk, his quick appreciation of merit, and his ever-present

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., I, 378-391.

kindliness won him the attachment and affection of a wide circle. James earned that reputation which has been so happily described by a recent biographer: "He could pass in America for the most cosmopolitan of philosophers and in Europe for the most American."<sup>60</sup> At the time of his death in 1910, James was perhaps the most influential American thinker of his day.

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60 "Il a pu passer en Amérique pour le plus cosmopolite et en Europe pour le plus américain des philosophes"; M. Le Breton, La Personnalité de William James, 1929, 35. Quoted by R. B. Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, I, 383.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ORIGINS OF JAMES'S THOUGHT

1. Problem of the origin of James's ideas.--We have seen in the first chapter that James was a voracious reader, incorrigibly vagrant, traveling now here and now there, seeing all things for himself, and seeking in the variety of his adventures what he lacked in profundity; that the power of his mind lay in its extreme mobility; that due to neurasthenic energy and activity, he was always "like a blob of mercury." This second chapter attempts to show what basic ideas and principles filled his mind. We are here concerned with the rather difficult question: where did he get his ideas?

2. His general philosophical method.--This chapter becomes the story of what happened when a voracious reader with a constant neurasthenic push to nervous activity turned his attention to the field of philosophy. James was well-schooled in scientific method and scientific facts, and had a profound psychological appreciation of life, which bordered on genius; but he had no training in metaphysics or in a rational criterion of truth. He approached and tried to master new fields on his own initiative without formal training. After teaching philosophy for twenty-five years at Harvard, he wrote:

"I originally studied medicine in order

to be a physiologist, but I drifted into psychology and philosophy from a sort of fatality. I never had any philosophic instruction, the first lecture on psychology I ever heard, being the first I ever gave."<sup>1</sup>

The fact that James taught philosophy at Harvard for twenty-five years although he received no formal training in the subject partially explains his philosophical habit or attitude of mind. He was purely a free-lance philosopher with no religious preconceptions, no religious dogmas, no training in metaphysics. His philosophy was to be his religion. His philosophical equipment was largely his home-training in a combative atmosphere of intellectual ideas and his scientific education, both of which had developed his power of critical analysis; in addition, he had a professor's knowledge of human physiology and the nervous system, and an authoritative knowledge of descriptive psychology and psychic states. His broad general experience of man and human life was his criterion of truth. His working method in mastering the field of philosophy was not strictly philosophical but rather scientific and psychological. He relied completely on his mastery of physiology, the nervous system, and psychology to give him insight and understanding in the field of philosophy. He saw philosophical ideas as parts of philosophical minds, not as concepts

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<sup>1</sup> R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 228. Quoted by Perry from A. Ménéard, Analyse et Critique des Principes de la Psychologie, 1911, 5: letter of Aug. 17, 1902.

of reality.

"What the system pretends to be is a picture of the great universe of God. What it is--and oh so flagrantly!-- is the revelation of how intensely odd the personal flavor of some fellow creature is."<sup>2</sup>

"The books of all great philosophers are like so many men. Our sense of an essential personal flavor, in each one of them, typical but indescribable, is the finest fruit of our own accomplished philosophical education."<sup>3</sup>

James evaluated the many philosophies he read and taught in the light of his broad experience, especially his psychological experience. His criterion of philosophy came to this: what kind of a psychological interpretation of the world does this philosophy give? How well does it adjust the individual psychologically to his environment?

### 3. The psychological interpretation of philosophy.--

Gradually, James developed his psychological method or focus and formulated its bearing on philosophy. He maintained that a philosophical argument never stands purely on its own merits of reason:

"Of whatever temperament a philosopher is, he tries, when philosophizing, to sink the fact of his temperament. Yet his temperament really gives him a stronger bias than any of his more strictly objective premises."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> William James, Pragmatism, Longmans, Green and Co., N.Y., 1907, 36.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 35-6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 7.

This, for James, was a fundamental principle touching all philosophies. Philosophy, he held, is relative to the human mind; it progresses when the human mind becomes better adapted to life. When James read philosophy, he read with pencil in hand poised to record the outpouring of his mind. Nothing ever happened to him that did not evoke a play of thought from him. He asked questions about everything: what is the meaning of things, the substance of things, and the destiny of things? What is the good of things and how may it be brought about? Once he had established a fact or a relationship, he impatiently rushed on to what was to him the real question: what shall we say or do about it?<sup>5</sup> It was this same quality which made him quite indifferent to ideas as such, as so many specimens or archtypes of human thinking. It is certain that a final truth already arrived at would never have satisfied his extreme mobility of mind. Every new insight or theory superseded those that went before as the best available belief. There was only one important question, namely, what, according to the completest available evidence, is true? The intellectual life would have made no appeal to him had it not been for the fortunate fact that all solutions promptly required revision.

4. Where his psychological method led.--William James was basically an eclectic in method. In brief compass, he came to adopt an evolutionary concept of an unfinished, changing mater-

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5 R.E. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 176.

ial universe; a biological and evolutionary concept of man, wherein consciousness is a biological addition to the organism for the sake of adaptation to man's environment. Religions are man-made institutions, and God cannot be known by reason. The only valid contact with a God is by personal religious experience. The British empirical tradition of Locke, Hume, and J.S. Mill was basic to James, out of which he adapted an experiential philosophy, where the mind is active and determines what is true by action into the stream of experience. From Renouvier he derived his famous "will to believe," whereby life's higher ideas of God, freedom, morality, and immortality, which were left unproved by British empiricism, can be believed for the sake of their good consequences in the way of a better psychological adjustment to this world. In short, James is a combination of British empiricism, Kantian practical idealism, evolution, biology, and psychology rolled into a new empirical and experiential view of life.

5. British empiricism and the post-Kantian inheritance in 1860.--When James first began to think for himself around 1860, he inherited in his general philosophical environment the legacy of sense empiricism from Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, and the two streams of thought from the metaphysical impulse of Kant flowing into the 19th century. The one stream of practical idealism, The Critique of Practical Reason, arose out of Kant's provision under the form of faith for God, freedom, and immortality, and in his qualified assent to a purposive



and aesthetic interpretation of nature; the other stream of modern idealism, from the Critique of Pure Reason, arose out of his doctrine of the organizing and creative activity of the knowing mind, through its forms of sensibility, its categories of understanding, and its ideas of reason. Each of these varieties of post-Kantian metaphysics proved capable of great diversification in the course of their later history both in Germany and abroad.<sup>6</sup> Significantly for James, the stage was here set for practical voluntarism and, ultimately, the complete rejection of reason.

6. The naturalism of the 19th century.--A rival philosophical movement of naturalism was inspired by the progress of the physical sciences in the 19th century. Emphasis on the content of the physical sciences led to materialism, based on theories of evolution and the conservation of matter and force; emphasis on the scientific form or method led to Positivism, which held that science alone provides genuine knowledge, and was more concerned with a scientific way of thinking than with the scientific account of the world. The naturalism of the 19th century stuck close to facts, scientific descriptive technique, and the natural satisfaction of human needs.<sup>7</sup> The new naturalism represented the cosmos as a majestic process of natural

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6 Historical analysis taken from R.B. Perry, Philosophy of the Recent Past, Charles Scribner's and Sons, N.Y., 1926, 1.

7 Ibid., 1922.

history, or a fixed quantity of matter, force, or energy, having multiple and variable manifestations. It claimed to offer a complete picture of nature in terms of science, and its most powerful impulse came from the biological conception of evolution.<sup>8</sup>

7. The inroads of biology and evolution on traditional thought.--Scientific thought appeared to constitute a decisive defeat for religion and for every system of thought that reserved a privileged place for man. There was a steadily growing disposition on the part of biology to avoid appeal to supernatural or metaphysical causes, and to construe life as a part of that nature which is, for scientific purposes, a closed and self-sufficient system. The new biological-evolutionary theories violated prevailing habits of mind rooted in the Aristotelian tradition. In accordance with these habits it was customary to classify the forms of life on the assumption that they had no history other than their reproduction in successive generations of individuals. In the second place, the new view seemed to violate the teachings of biblical orthodoxy, or that account of natural origins which was authoritatively recorded in the Book of Genesis. Deeper than either of these was the conflict between the new teachings and the teleological doctrines of the great philosophers. Both pagan and Christian philosophy had taught that nature could not be ade-

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 20-80.

quately explained without resort to a principle variously known as purpose, final cause, providence, and design. The mechanical theory of physics had made great inroads upon this doctrine, and the living organism was looked upon as its last stronghold. If this marvel of nice adjustment and functional utility could be explained by the fortuitous operation of blind forces, then nature no longer afforded evidence of intelligence or of spirit or of God.<sup>9</sup> Evolutionary naturalism created the impression of reducing nature to an all-pervading and ceaseless flux without refuge or anchorage. Life had always worn an aspect of generation and decay, but had been redeemed by the Platonic-Aristotelian idea that the forms which it embodied were permanent and stable principles ultimately coming from God. Now all of these moorings seemed to be dissolved into a flood sweeping blindly on without origin, destination, or fixed landmarks. This led more and more to the rejection of the traditional conception of a providential God. Not only did the law of natural selection seem to destroy the force of the argument from design, but it revealed nature in a light that was scarcely compatible with the supposition of benevolent and providential authorship.<sup>10</sup>

8. James's lifelong contact with science.--We have seen that William James from an early age had a scientific turn of

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9 Ibid., 26-29.

10 Ibid., 29.

mind, that he had a few elementary courses in science and mathematics while in Europe, and that as he grew older he tended to reject his father's speculative ideas as scientifically unfounded. In 1859, just two years before he entered Harvard, appeared Darwin's Origin of Species, which was gradually to lead into a new epoch in science and philosophy. At Harvard James absorbed the evolutionary doctrines of Darwin and Spencer, and came under the influence of the two outstanding scientists already mentioned, Agassiz and Wyman. The philosophical importance of Agassiz and Wyman seems to lie in the fact that they introduced James to a knowledge and method of dealing with facts and concrete reality at first-hand.<sup>11</sup> This insistence on the concrete fulness of the real world, as contrasted with the bare, abstract philosophical outline, became a definite part of James, a part of his experiential philosophy and his empiricism, and a foundation for his distrust of abstraction and of reason.<sup>12</sup> Agassiz became an irresistible personal force. As James wrote:

"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."<sup>13</sup>

Science became a life interest of William James. He began to

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11 R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 463-473.

12 Ibid., I, 449-462.

13 William James, Memories and Studies, Longmans, Green and Co., N.Y., 1911, 10, 14.

study science at a time when it was undergoing a major transition caused by scientific evolution and the law of conservation of force and energy. His medical training, together with his own personal depression and psychopathic experience, implanted in him a deep interest in psychology.<sup>14</sup> In 1868 while studying the nervous system in Europe, he described himself as "wading his way towards the field of psychology through the physiology of the senses,"<sup>15</sup> and he spoke of his own studies as possibly helping to prepare the way for the appearance of a new psychology. He returned to Harvard in 1872, and for the next few years gave courses in anatomy, physiology, and experimental psychology. He taught his courses by the comparative method; his textbooks were mainly Spencer, Bain, and Taine, and he was also familiar with the works of Mill and Maudsley.<sup>16</sup> Up to 1878, when he began to prepare his systematic treatise on psychology, the psychological problem that interested him most deeply was that of the relation between mind and body. This problem stood at the cross-roads where science and religion met, and where physiology met psychology. Between 1891 and 1898 he wrote a large number of psychological reviews, some fifty-five or so in number, and in 1902 he published his psychological study of religious experiences. These all converge to prove that James was preoccupied with science, particularly psychology and psychic states, all his life.

14 R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 468-9.

15 Henry James, Letters of William James, I, 126-7.

16 R. B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, II, 51-71.

9. The birth of psychology in America.--When James began to teach at Harvard, experimental psychology was but in embryo, and there was no definitive treatment of the subject. As he wrote in a letter:

"Whose theories in psychology have any definitive value today? No one's. Their only use is to sharpen further reflection and observation."<sup>17</sup>

James was a key figure in the field when modern psychology was being founded, and experienced in himself the motives which led to its founding. He himself started it at Harvard:

"A real science of man is now being built up out of the theory of evolution and the facts of archaeology, the nervous system and the senses...."<sup>18</sup>

"I myself founded the instruction in experimental psychology at Harvard in 1874-5 or 1876, I forget which."<sup>19</sup>

The first of James's major scientific works was the Principles of Psychology, which appeared in 1890 when the author was forty-eight years old. It was a work of first importance not only for James but for the history of psychology--the fruit of over twenty years of study and writing, carried on during the critical period in the development of the subject to which it was devoted. The "science" of psychology was "in such a confused and imperfect state that every paragraph presented

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., II, 118, letter to Munsterberg, July 8, 1891.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., II, 11, letter of William James to Pres. Eliot of Harvard, Dec. 2, 1875.

<sup>19</sup> William James, Science, N.S., II, (1895) 626.

some unforeseen snag."<sup>20</sup> In other words, between 1878 and 1890, James was not only composing a systematic work on psychology, but making observations, searching out acceptable hypotheses, and waging a vigorous polemical warfare. He argued that no theory which slights either mind or body can possibly be the last word on the matter. He held that we know mind better than we do the nervous system and cannot, therefore, argue psychology from physiology. The fact that James was an American accounts for the peculiar catholicism of his psychology. While in Europe, he benefited by the movements in German, French, and English psychology without surrendering himself to any of them. His wide acquaintance and mobility, both of person and mind, enabled him to sit at all of these feasts and combine their several values.<sup>21</sup> Though he himself was fundamentally a psychologist in outlook, he did not himself contribute experimental results of importance. The psychologists of whose writings James made the largest use, as judged by citations and references in the Principles, were Spencer, Helmholtz, Wundt, and Bain. Spencer and Wundt he both used and rejected, using them as reservoirs of fact and as texts for discussion, rejecting their characteristic and dominating ideas.<sup>22</sup>

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20 R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, II, 40.

21 Ibid., II, 1-24.

22 Ibid., II, 54.

10. His method in descriptive psychology.--Just as James was bound to no national movement, so he was restricted to no technique. He was an exceptionally acute observer of the natural man in all the varied aspects of his life. He had a lively and vivacious imagination. He used whatever facts he could find for himself or gather from other observers, interpreted them freely, and constructed an image of human nature which after fifty years is not yet obsolete.<sup>23</sup> He saw man in the round, as he presents himself to the clinician, the biologist, the traveler, the artist, and the novelist. He was willing to learn about man from any source, however disesteemed by orthodox scientists.<sup>24</sup> His more or less unorthodox excursions into the psychical research of mediums, spirit contact, real and spurious mysticism are well known. James sought for a non-metaphysical explanation of mental events, sequences, and concurrences, and he believed that the physiology of the nervous system offered the most likely prospect. Because it did not substitute abstract analyses for the concrete living mind, the reader constantly recognized himself in its descriptions and illustrations. It was not systematic, but rather exploring and depicting human nature in all its dimensions, gathering facts from any quarter and by any method, and theorizing as the spirit moved, undismayed by the prospect of starting something that could not be completed.<sup>25</sup> The result was

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23 Ibid., II, 24.

24 Ibid., II, 51.

25 Ibid., II, 91.



that the Principles was acclaimed by laymen and beginners, by students of other subjects who looked for some special application of psychology to their own problems, and by philosophical or non-sectarian students of psychology who had not yet become trained or biased by any special method of investigation; while at the same time it was viewed with some shade of disapproval by laboratory experimentalists and systematizers.<sup>26</sup>

There was so much of the spice of humor and imagination as to blur the sharp boundaries of scientific thought. James had a romantic mind, eager for new adventure, and he was repelled by detail and repetition. The psychological laboratory frankly bored him, not because of its instruments, but because of its measurements. He came not only to dislike the psychological laboratory, but also to disbelieve in any fruitfulness commensurable with the effort expended. He prized the flexible and inventive mind, hoping that some such mind might happily hit upon a new and more fruitful theory.<sup>27</sup>

11. The effect of science on James the philosopher.---

This treatment of science and psychology was made in order to indicate how fundamental to James was the physiology of the nervous system and of the senses as an approach to psychological states of mind. From 1870 to 1910 James studied any and all human experience, wherever found, in terms of psychic

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26 Ibid., II, 92.

27 Ibid., II, 114.

states and their physiological accompaniments. His fundamental approach to everything in life, including philosophy, became biological and psychological. In brief, his love of facts and concreteness learned from Agassiz allied to his acute scientific observation of human nature and human experience led him to spurn metaphysics and abstract philosophies, and to favor the sensible concreteness of British empiricism and a practical experiential philosophy.

12. His fifty-year contact with philosophy.---James is reputed to have been the most widely read philosopher of his day. His interest in philosophy ran parallel and concurrently with his interest in science. As a youth at Harvard he read the field of natural evolution thoroughly, beginning with Darwin and Spencer's First Principles, in 1862, and proceeding through W. Wundt, E. Lasswitz, J.B. Stallo, C. Wright, B. Steward, D.D. Heath, J.C. Maxwell, P.G. Tait, E. Mach, J. Delboeuf, E. Haeckel, and E. Iles.<sup>28</sup> Atomism and the constitution of matter drew James into a detailed consideration of the history of physics, and he frequently resorted to sources such as Aristotle, Descartes, Newton, Herschel, Boscovich, Cournot, Clerk Maxwell, Thomson, Boltzman, and Planck; but he depended mainly for the history of physics on Kurd Lasswitz's compendious Geshichte der Atomistik and Ernst Mach's Die Mechanik in ihrer Entwicklung, both of which were carefully

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28 Ibid., I, 483 note.

read and annotated.<sup>29</sup> He read the field of modern experimental psychology thoroughly: Spencer, Helmholtz, Wundt, Bain, E. Hering, J. Delboeuf, G.T. Fechner, Carl Stumpf, W.B. Carpenter, H. Ebbinghaus, S. Exner, T. Lipps, G.E. Muller, G.H. Schnieder, James Ward, Ernst Mach, and Hugo Munsterberg.<sup>30</sup> He read Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding in 1876, and his copy is marked and annotated from cover to cover. In a similar way he read and annotated George Berkeley, David Hume, J.S. Mill, Immanuel Kant, Charles Renouvier, Waldo Emerson, Shadworth Hodgson, Charles Peirce, Josiah Royce, George Howison, F. Schiller, John Dewey, and Henri Bergson; he also read "the classic rationalists, Aristotle and Plato, some of the scholastics, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Kant, and Hegel, who supplemented the experienced world by clear and pure ideal constructions for which they claimed absolute finality."<sup>31</sup> During his twenty-five years of teaching at Harvard in the field of philosophy, James gave courses in Spencer, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Renouvier, Descartes, Leibnitz, and Spinoza.

13. Contact with Darwin, Spencer, and Evolution.--In 1861 at Harvard, evolution was the first scientific and philosophical problem James treated, and the evolutionary hypothesis of

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., I, 491 note.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., II, 56.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., I, 724, 725 note.

Darwin and Spencer became his fundamental view of the physical world. James both read Darwin as a student and taught Darwin as a professor in his physiology and anatomy courses. In 1868 he wrote reviews of Darwin's Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication,<sup>32</sup> in which he praises Darwin as a scientist, but commented on the absence of any explanation of the origin of variations. In the decade of the 1860's, Spencer extended the idea of evolution through all the branches of human knowledge, and also diffused it through the reading public. Owing to the fact that James began to study science, read philosophy, and think for himself in the '60's, the writings of Spencer furnished the most important part of his early philosophical pabulum.<sup>33</sup> It was the period of the vogue of Spencer. In the year 1879-1880 James gave a course in the "Philosophy of Evolution (Philosophy 3)" in which he used Spencer's First Principles as a text.<sup>34</sup> The book was read, underscored, and profusely annotated. Spencer was one of the three major sources of James's book on psychology. After dealing with Spencer for thirty years, James concluded in 1892:

"The one virtue is Spencer's belief in the universality of evolution--the 1,000 crimes are his 5,000 pages of absolute incompetence to work it out in detail."<sup>35</sup>

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32 Ibid., I, 469.

33, Ibid., I, 474.

34 Ibid., I, 482.

35 William James, Memories and Studies, 128.

14. Evolutionary ideas absorbed by James.---Though Spencer failed to work out evolution satisfactorily in James's eyes, nevertheless the philosophical problems arising out of the evolutionary theory gave rise to many stark evolutionary conclusions in his mind. Evolution involved James in definite conclusions touching the mystery of the universe's existence, teleology in the world, the problem of evil, God's existence, and psychological problems touching the unity of consciousness. Evolution also introduced him to the growing battle between scientific materialism and religion. Because he held evolution throughout his life, he never solved the problem of the origin of the existing universe, as he so often reiterates with a touch of agnostic perplexity:

"There is an ultimate mystery attaching to fact. Having learned what the universe is, there still remains the mystery that it is, instead of nothing."<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, James did not solve the problem of evil. He was acutely conscious of this problem from three sources: concretely in his own physical disabilities, in the physical world around him, and in the psychopathic cases studies he made of insane minds. The presence of evil in the world seemed to give a confirmation of the struggle-and-survival theory of evolution. James concluded:

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<sup>36</sup> James's lecture notes on "Spencer-Philosophy 3," given 1880-81, 1883-84, 1884-85, 1894-95, 1896-97. R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 484.

"If God is perfection, supreme goodness, how did there ever have to come any imperfection? No one has ever got round this."<sup>37</sup>

When he investigated the question of teleology or purpose in nature, the outcome was negative:

"All things fit in some way. Eyes with cataract fit light so as to exclude it; stomach without gastric juice fits food so as to let it ferment. . . the world has a collective unity, and in every unity the parts fit so as to produce some results."<sup>38</sup>

From this negation of teleology, James concluded there could be only one reason for transcending the world of phenomena, namely, to satisfy some theoretical or practical "sentiment of rationality." But God's existence could not be proved by reason:

"In short, from the order of the world there is no path to God by coercive reasoning, or even by strong analogy or induction. That we believe in a God. . . is not due to our logic, but to our emotional wants. The world is a datum, a gift to man. Man stands and asks himself, 'What is it?' Science says molecules, religion says God. Both are hypotheses. Science says, 'You can't deduce or explain anything by yours.' Religion says, 'You can't inspire or console by yours.' Which is worth most is, after all, the question. Molecules can do certain things for us. God can do other things. Which things are worth most?"<sup>39</sup>

Spencer also confronted him with the unsolved problem of es-

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., I, 484.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., I, 492.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., I, 493.

establishing the unity of consciousness, a problem which James turned over and over in his mind for many years: "how do conscious molecules run together and form a unified consciousness?"<sup>40</sup> He finally tried to answer this problem with his continuous stream of consciousness wherein the "thinker" is the "thought" and all consciousness is always found unified in the stream of experience.

15. Total effect of evolution on his thought.---Evolution became not only James's fundamental view of the physical world, but also of man, who seeks adaptation to his environment. The influence of Darwin was both early and profound, and the effects crop up in diverse quarters of James's thought. Fundamentally Darwinian was his tendency to view life as a hazardous experiment with all of its instrumentalities on trial. His view of the world came to be that of an unfinished cosmos, a bounding and unbounded universe, that no one, not even God, knew completely. The presence of evil and evolutionary change in the world tended to eliminate an all-powerful and omniscient God for a finite one. James did not follow Darwin's emphasis on continuity. That nature never makes leaps---natura non facit saltum---was not part of his vision of things. To sum up, because of evolutionary change, James rejected teleology in the world, failed to find the origin of the universe's existence, and accepted evil as an inevitable

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., I, 490, 476-480.

part of evolution; he rejected the proof of God's existence from order, denied an omniscient and all-powerful God, and came to look upon consciousness in man as a biological addition for adapting him to his environment.<sup>41</sup> Ideas evolve in the mind just as the physical world evolves outside the mind; there are no eternal essences. James joined biology and evolution to form a new concept of man and his ideas.

16. His contact with British Empiricism.--James had found science congenial on account of its fidelity to fact and its attachment to the concrete parts of life. Quite naturally, he found the sensistic tradition of British empiricism rather congenial to his other convictions touching evolution, physiology, and the nervous system of man.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, empiricism was adopted as the foundation of his empirical and experiential philosophy of Pragmatism.<sup>43</sup> His esteem for Locke grew through the years. He referred to "the good Locke," and his "dear old book."<sup>44</sup> His personal copy of the Essay Concerning

41 William James, Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals, Henry Holt and Co., N.Y., 1899, Ch. III, "The Child as a Behaving Organism," 24-25: "Consciousness would thus seem in the first instance to be nothing but a sort of superadded biological perfection. . . Lay your emphasis on the fact that man, whatever else he may be, is primarily a practical being, whose mind is given him to aid in adapting him to this world's life."

42 R.E. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I 468.

43 Ibid., I, 449-462.

44 Ibid., I, 545.



Human Understanding came into his hands in September, 1876. His first thorough study of Locke may be dated as falling between 1876 and the year 1883, in which he inaugurated "Philosophy 5" at Harvard--a course on "English philosophy." He read and taught Berkeley and Hume, admiring Berkeley in particular, for his attacks on abstraction. Broadly speaking, James allied himself with the classic empirical tradition originating in Locke, and represented in his own day by John S. Mill.<sup>45</sup>

17. Ideas from British empiricism.--With Locke's view of the priority and preeminence of particulars James heartily agreed. "In particulars our knowledge begins and so spreads itself to generals."<sup>46</sup> All knowledge is grounded on experience; all ideas are known "by their native evidence."<sup>46</sup> James adopted Locke's "nominal essence." "The mind may choose what it shall regard as the essence of the individual, that is to say, under what aspect or abstract idea the individual may be considered."<sup>47</sup> What shall determine this choice? Practicalism. He saw Locke's Essay as a great revolution in philosophy away from abstract principles and natures toward concrete sensations and particulars. Personality is now explained as a result of experiences, and not assumed as a principle. On the

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45 Ibid., I, 544.

46 William James, A Pluralistic Universe, Longmans, Green, and Co., N.Y., 1909, 339-343.

47 William James's copy of Locke's Essay, 276, 296, 300.

one hand, he charged Hume with a failure to provide for relations, and on the other welcomed him with open arms because of the weapons provided against monism and Hegelian determinism.

"Hume can be corrected and built out, and his beliefs enriched, without making use of the circuitous and ponderous artificialsities of Kant."

"The Humean philosophy is useful as a protest against the Hegelian spirit. It ought to combine itself with free will, as none of the absolute philosophies can."<sup>48</sup>

James owed little to Mill on fundamental points of doctrine, though he felt a personal sympathy with him as an empiricist unafflicted with the closed mind of positivists.<sup>49</sup>

18. James develops empiricism.--James joined traditional British empiricism to biology and evolution, thereby fusing the trends of his age into a new empirical and experiential synthesis. Locke's theory of knowledge tended to give the mind a comparatively passive role, just receiving sensations and combining them into nominal essences. This James rejected; his vigorous attacks on the passive mind, or passive receptivity to the external order, reflect an early Darwinian influence of active adaptation.<sup>50</sup> He abandoned altogether the notion that the mind is a tabula rasa on which impressions

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48 Conclusion of his course on English philosophy; R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 552.

49 Ibid., I, 552, 554.

50 Ibid., I, 454.

from abroad record themselves in the order of their happening, and insisted on the importance of inborn traits and subjective interests.<sup>51</sup> Intellect faces experience and looks forward to the future. "Where one gets one's ideas, whether it be innate or acquired, God-given or man-made does not matter. The question is whether it is a good idea and the test of that lies in its relevance to experience."<sup>52</sup> He stresses experiment in which the knowing mind takes the initiative, and makes offers which the environment selects or rejects.<sup>53</sup> The mind, in James's conception, never plays a passive role. It directly intuits the concrete existing world and it is actively conscious of the stream of sensations; it fashions its ideas according to interests and desires, and then submits its ideas to the existing world for verification. James stresses an intuition by sense perception because of what he assumes regarding it, namely, that in this character the mind is most closely conformed to the existential course of events. Man is an organism with a biological addition of consciousness. The senses are supposed to be ports of entry, through which the mind receives cargoes from abroad; or antennae, by which the contour and behavior of the environment are "encountered" by the exploratory organism.<sup>54</sup> In arriving at knowledge, the

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51 Ibid., I, 557.

52 Ibid., I, 453, 571.

53 Ibid., I, 454.

54 William James, Principles of Psychology, Henry Holt and Co., N.Y., 1890, II, 7.

knowing mind itself INITIATES the ideas to which an a posteriori test is applied. In short, man must actively experience reality by intuition and activity. It is the theory that existence shines in its own peculiar light, or reveals its native quality in certain peculiarly authentic modes of immediate sense apprehension or intuitive perception. "The deeper features of reality are found only in perceptual experience,"<sup>55</sup> by one who knows how to find them there.

19. All hypotheses subject to change.--James's empiricism lies in the fact that he accepts a verdict from without through the medium of sensibility; but he submits proposals, and these proposals he first contrives by an act of will.<sup>56</sup> In emphasizing the voluntary activity of the knowing mind, James's method was also in close agreement with scientific method. In forming and trying hypotheses the mind is not only active, but interested. It tries what it hopes is true. This subjective interest is both unavoidable and legitimate. If the mind wanted nothing, it would try nothing. Every cognitive project is on trial, and bound to submit itself to fresh findings of fact, no matter what other credentials it may possess. This includes the judgments of science, common sense, religion, and metaphysics. Even matters of fact are hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience. In the

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55 William James, Some Problems of Philosophy, Longmans, Green, and Co., N.Y., 1911, 87, 98, 100.

56 R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 454-5.

elaboration of its hypotheses, the mind employs concepts or general ideas, and these it can, if it so desires, compare among themselves, as in mathematics; but concepts just fund experience and give it a name, and are both in their meaning and in their use subordinate to the direct perception of fact.<sup>57</sup>

20 The union of empiricism, biology, and evolution.--

James's empirical and experiential philosophy results in an organism, conscious of sensations, which actively experiences the changing environment and adapts itself to it. Abstraction and reason are forgotten; concreteness and individuality are emphasized: real life is to see the world directly as it is in all its sensible fulness. The Jamesian philosopher is but a contemporary biographer of a changing universe and of changing human nature; he tries to "catch" or "get" the world's likeness and intuit the image of man.<sup>58</sup> All the traditional bridges to be crossed between matter and spirit, between sensations and ideas, between natures and their operations, and the causal sequence outside and inside the mind are solved at one stroke. All the gaps are filled up by James "with positive experiential content."<sup>59</sup> All reality is a unified experience in the flowing "stream of consciousness."<sup>59</sup> Reality construed empirically as an experiential continuum in the mind has unity both of kind and of connection. Since truth can only be veri-

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57 Ibid., I, 455.

58 Ibid., I, 458-459.

59 Ibid., I, 460-461, 571.

fied by a concrete sensation, life's higher ideas involving God, freedom, an after-life of immortality, a solid basis for morality, cannot be verified by sense experience, and consequently are left up in the air as "open questions" by James's empiricism.

21. Contact with Renouvier.--James then found a key with which to establish life's higher ideas of God, immortality, freedom, and morality in the philosophy of Charles Renouvier. James's two great reformers of empiricism and "two foremost contemporary philosophers"<sup>60</sup> were Shadworth Hodgson and Charles Renouvier. Renouvier's influence came first, and lasted longer, and penetrated more deeply; he became the greatest individual influence upon James's thought.<sup>61</sup> In 1868 James became acquainted with his writings,<sup>62</sup> and in 1870, when suffering from ill-health and psychopathic depression, James was peculiarly attuned to a gospel such as Renouvier offered, the right, namely, to believe what the moral will dictates. Renouvier's Psychologie Rationelle with its doctrine of freedom solved the crisis of James's life and thereafter he found health, courage, and new philosophical insight. From 1872 to 1898 he corresponded with Renouvier, and several times visited him in Europe.<sup>63</sup> In the years 1879-1880 he took the bold step

60 Henry James, Letters of William James, I, 203.

61 R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 465.

62/ Ibid., I, 285.

63 Ibid., I, 382.

of offering a course in Renouvier at Harvard based on his untranslated works. Renouvier's theories of freedom, his phenomenalism, his pluralism, his fideism, his moralism, and his theism were all congenial to James's mind, and in them he found support and confirmation of his own view of life.<sup>64</sup>

22. Renouvier connects James with Kant.--To James, Renouvier was first of all an empiricist. His Renouvier was the philosopher who identified the real with the apparent, and knowledge with evident presence; who substituted "representations" for substances or other hidden entities.<sup>65</sup> He proclaimed Renouvier "the classical and finished representative of the tendency which was begun by Hume."<sup>65</sup> Renouvier's two main sources were Kant and Hume. In philosophy, James always looked forward to progress in knowledge, and was never interested in going to the bottom of things metaphysically so as to find what lies behind the scene, especially not with any "scholastic apparatus."

"M. Renouvier's polemic against the metaphysical notions of substance, of infinite in existence, and of abstract ideas seems to us more powerful than anything which has been written in English."<sup>66</sup>

James, above all, learned freedom from Renouvier. After his conversion from determinism by the "will to believe," Renou-

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64 Ibid., I, 655.

65 Ibid., I, 656.

66 William James, Collected Essays and Reviews, Longmans, Green, and Co., N.Y., 1920, 29.

vier's second doctrine of a pluralistic universe falls right in line. The possibility of freedom involves, so Renouvier and James agreed, a particular kind of universe in which there are "original commencements of series of phenomena, whose realization excludes other series which were previously possible."<sup>67</sup> The one philosophy which is fatal to freedom is "monism, with its all-enveloping, all-constricting whole."<sup>68</sup> It was of first importance to them that the unity should not predetermine the many. Hence the significance of Renouvier's view that the whole is an expression of the interaction of originally independent forces. Therein lies the whole ground of that priority of part to whole which James concluded was the essence of empiricism.<sup>69</sup> He dissented from Renouvier's intellectualism, from his monadism, and from certain of his speculative extravagances. His monadism was to James excessively pluralistic. "His world is so much dust, pre-established harmony dis-established."<sup>70</sup> This ran contrary to James's view of an inter-penetrating and continuous flow of existence, where causality is a real **transition**.

23. Renouvier's voluntarism and fideism.--Renouvier's voluntarism and fideism touched James most deeply. The empiri-

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>68</sup> R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 659.

<sup>69</sup> William James, A Pluralistic Universe, 7, 8.

<sup>70</sup> Henry James, Letters of William James, I, 334.



cist, according to Renouvier, abandoning the hope of absolute certainty except for a narrow and momentary certainty in the immediate presence of particular facts, will recognize the discrepancy between this dubiousness of knowledge and the assurance of belief. Belief is nothing if not sure; reason cannot ensure it; therefore, the consummation of belief can take place only through an act of will--a premature and hazardous self-commitment. The belief is completed--clinched, adopted, fixated--by a subjective act impelled by subjective motives. Where experience and logic are not decisive, and where there is at the same time a practical need of belief, there belief may and should be dictated by moral and religious considerations. This voluntarism and fideism flows into a correlative interpretation given to the history of philosophy. Renouvier maintained that all of the great philosophical systems are impressions of the temperaments and inclinations of their authors, however much they may profess to submit only to irresistible proofs.<sup>71</sup>

24. The significance of Renouvier for James.--James popularized Renouvier's fideism under the title, "the will to believe," and made it a working principle in modern philosophy. When tied down by the limitations of sensistic empiricism, a philosopher can arrive by belief at higher ideas touching God's existence, immortality, freedom, morality, and religion. Renouvier gave James his freedom, his pluralistic

universe, his voluntaristic interpretation of philosophy and philosophers, and his "will to believe." Fundamentally based on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason, voluntarism and the "will to believe" are the traditional escape from the limitations of sense empiricism. With reason denied any validity, fideism must take its place, or life is not livable in the practical sphere of daily action.

25. His thirty-year contact with Hodgson.---James reckoned Shadworth Hodgson "the wealthiest mine of thought he ever met with," and one of the "two foremost contemporary philosophers."<sup>72</sup> He talked and corresponded with him for over thirty years. James names him along with Charles Sanders Peirce as one of the two sources of his Pragmatism.<sup>73</sup> Hodgson was a professed empiricist. Like Renouvier he wages war in behalf of phenomena against all substances and substrata. He fills hundreds of pages with meticulous analyses of a peculiarly elusive sort, in which the beginning slips away before the end is reached. But everywhere in him James found happy and original ideas, new and illuminating ways of seeing old things.<sup>74</sup> Hodgson also had a recreant side, abominated by James, wherein he denied freedom and reduced mind to dependence on the body.

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72 Ibid., I, 203. Also William James, Collected Essays and Reviews, 133.

73 R. B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 612.

74 Ibid., I, 611-627.

26. James's debt to Hodgson.--Hodgson secured a hold on James's mind second only to that of Renouvier; he emphasized the temper of trusting to experience--that is the secret of philosophy.<sup>75</sup> His idea was to base philosophy no longer on an assumption, but on direct experience. Hodgson's importance to James is also especially evident in matters of detail. He helped James to bridge the chasms created both by the traditional dualism and by Hume's sensationistic atomism. He anticipated James in his emphasis on the continuity and fluidity of the "conscious stream," and arrived at it from his analysis of time.<sup>76</sup> He held that the static juxtaposition of parts is an artificial effect of analysis. Time itself is ceaseless passage, and not a series of pauses. "Strictly, there is no present. What we call loosely the present is an empirical portion of the course of time."<sup>76</sup> The stream of consciousness and the concrete fulness of all experience within the stream gave James a working unity for the disparate elements in his system of thought or his way of thinking. As James later wrote:

"Every examiner of the sensible life in concreto must see that relations of every sort, of time, space, difference, likeness, change, rate, cause or what not, are just as integral members of the sensational flux as terms are, and that conjunctive relations are just as true members of the flux as disjunctive relations are."<sup>77</sup>

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75 Ibid., I, 611, 612.

76 Ibid., I, 613.

77 William James, A Pluralistic Universe, 279-280.

The self's unity and reflexive consciousness is simply identified with specific sensorial and affective complexes in which the ego as "judging thought" takes its place in the common stream.<sup>78</sup> The traditional chasms which other modern schools leave unbridged, or which they bridge by elaborate metaphysical constructions, are filled by James with a positive, experiential content. This, in large part, is James's debt to Shadworth Hodgson.

27. Contact with Charles Peirce.--James first encountered Charles Sanders Peirce, three years his senior, when they were both fellow students of chemistry in the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard. Peirce was a lifelong intellectual friend and irritant. In 1898 James introduced Peirce to the wider philosophical public in America as the originator of pragmatism. In the lecture "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results" delivered in 1898, James writes that he heard Peirce enunciate "the principle of practicalism,--or pragmatism, as he called it," in Cambridge in the early '70's.<sup>79</sup> In the 1870's a club was formed in Cambridge which included among its members Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Fiske, Chauncey Wright, William James, and Charles Sanders Peirce.<sup>80</sup> It was in this group that Peirce formulated the concept and coined the word "pragmatism."<sup>81</sup>

78 R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 571.

79 William James, Collected Essays and Reviews, 410.

80 R. B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 534.

81 Ibid., II, 407.

Peirce was an empiricist with the habits of mind of the laboratory. As a logician he was interested in the art and technique of real thinking, and especially interested, as far as pragmatic method is concerned, in the art of making concepts clear, or of constructing adequate and effective definitions in accord with the spirit of scientific method. The most important aspect of Peirce's pragmatic theory was its insistence on the inseparable connection between the individual's thought and his purposes. Allied was the belief that a concept could only be defined in terms of its bearing upon actual behavior. This belief was given its clearest formulation in Peirce's famous article, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" in 1878. "Consider what effects which might conceivably have practical bearings we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object."<sup>82</sup> Peirce said that through action concepts can be applied to existence, and that it is only through such application that concepts can be given any clear meaning. Concepts are no longer thought to be reflections of an external reality; they are logical instruments for the active exploration of a world which is to be known only through living. The term "pragmatic," contrary to the opinion of those who regard Pragmatism as an exclusively American conception, was suggested to Peirce by the study of Kant. Peirce explicitly states, in his

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82 Charles Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," Popular Science Monthly, XII (1898), 293.

contribution to the article on "Pragmatist and Pragmatism" in the Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, 1902, that he derived his view from Kant.<sup>83</sup> In the Metaphysics of Morals Kant established a distinction between pragmatic and practical: the latter term applies to moral laws which Kant regards as apriori whereas the former term applies to the rules of art and technique which are based on experience and are applicable to experience.

28. James uses Peirce's pragmatic idea.---Peirce made James acutely conscious of an idea which he had already imbibed, and continued to imbibe, from many sources. Peirce's essay lay unnoticed for twenty years. In the address of 1898 James credited Peirce with giving his thought "the most likely direction in which to start up the trail of truth," by pointing out that "the effective meaning of any philosophical proposition can always be brought down to some particular consequence, in our future practical experience, whether active or passive; the point lying rather in the fact that the experience must be particular, than in the fact that it must be active."<sup>84</sup> In this address and in an allusion of 1902 James identifies pragmatism with "the great English way of investigating a conception"; and credits Peirce with singling out and

83 R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, II, 410, note.

84 William James, Collected Essays and Reviews, 412.

naming the principle by which English and Scotch philosophers "were instinctively guided."<sup>85</sup> In 1904 he credits Peirce with the word "pragmatism," and says that he (James) uses it to indicate "a method of carrying on abstract discussion," according to which "the serious meaning of a concept lies. . . in the concrete difference to someone which its being true will make."<sup>86</sup> But Peirce was by no means satisfied with the use which James and others made of his term, and in 1905 he coined the word "pragmaticism," which he said, "was ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers."<sup>87</sup> Writing to Mrs. Ladd-Franklin in 1905,<sup>88</sup> he said: "Although James calls himself a pragmatist, and no doubt he derived his ideas on the subject from me, yet there is a most essential difference between his pragmatism and mine!" According to Peirce, the meaning of the concept should be construed in terms of conduct, and not in terms of sensation; and, in the second place, it is construed in terms of generality and not in terms of particularity. Apparently, James's pragmatism is disowned by Peirce, and the modern movement known as Pragmatism is the result of James's reinterpretation of Peirce.

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85 William James, Collected Essays and Reviews, 434; Varieties of Religious Experience, 444.

86 William James, Collected Essays and Reviews, 448; The Meaning of Truth, Longmans, Green, and Co., N.Y., 1909, 51.

87 R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, II, 409. Quoted by Perry from the Monist, XV (1905), 165-6.

88 Ibid., II, 409. Quoted by Perry from the Journal of Philosophy, XIII (1916), 718.

29. James battles with idealism.--James fought two prolonged battles with idealism, the one with Berkeleyan, the other with Kantian idealism. He wrestled long with Berkeleyan idealism, and only at the end of his career could he pronounce unequivocally in favor of realism.<sup>89</sup> Berkeleyan idealism was professedly empirical and consisted in the doctrine that we learn from experience that all existence is mental. Only perceptions exist, together with the minds which give and receive them. In 1833-4-5 in giving his course on Locke, Berkeley, and Hume at Harvard, James's lectures were full of the topic of idealism.<sup>90</sup> He was "staggered" by the difficulty of reconciling an ideal intelligence with the existence of separate finite minds.

"When it comes to a positive construction of idealism, such questions as how many spirits there are, how the divine spirit sends us our representations if we are separate from him, and how if we are only bits of him we can have separate consciousness at all, and a host of others, start up and baffle me, at least, completely."<sup>91</sup>

"I am led to it on the one hand by the utter failure, as it seems to me, of all sensationalists to explain cognition. . . and in trying to deduce knowledge from pure sensation it seems to me sensation-ists always surreptitiously introduce it ready-made at some step in the process, or else utterly fail to account for it at all. Naked they come into the world, and if honest they ought to go naked out of it. But they always steal the clothes

89 Ibid., I, 573-585.

90 Ibid., I, 577.

91 R. B. Perry, quoting a letter to W.M. Salter, 1885. Ibid., I, 578.



of the no-ologists, and there is no doubt it takes some subtlety to strip them when once draped therewith."<sup>92</sup>

James gradually developed an answer to the problem of the objective existence of objects and their existence in the mind. His examination of idealism led him, aided and abetted by Renouvier's phenomenism, to the view that subject and object are on equal footing, as the two complementary aspects of every "phenomenon." The phenomenon or "representation" of Renouvier construed as both subject and object, was to become the phenomenon of "pure experience" construed as neither, in the stream of conscious experience.<sup>93</sup>

30. His struggle with Kantian idealism.--Kantian idealism argues that the order of nature can be known only provided we suppose it to be the product of a unifying thought. The order of nature is thought into it by the mind and its categories, and there must be an all-ordering mind to do the work. This is the Kantian answer to Hume--an answer which James believed was unnecessary because experience, faithfully discerned, provided its own unities, and they need not come from the mind.

"The line of philosophic progress lies not so much through Kant as round him. Pray contribute no farther to philosophy's prison discipline of dragging Kant around like a cannonball tied to its ankle."<sup>94</sup>

92 Manuscript of James, Phenomenalism, written possibly in 1884 as a part of his preparation for "Philosophy 5."

93 R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 580, 585.

94. William James, Principles, II, 275.

In the years 1896-7 James gave a seminar on Kant. The apriori method in philosophy was a philosophical procedure that could never find lodgment in James's mind. He flatly rejected Kant, and was offended by Kant's "ponderous artificialities,"<sup>95</sup> and his "mythological machine-shop of forms and categories."<sup>96</sup> The new idealism emanating from Kant, and transformed by Fichte, Schopenhauer, and Hegel into a constructive metaphysics, threatened to conquer the dominion of the 19th century intellectual world, and it was profoundly alien to James. James fought this issue out with Royce, Howison, and Bradley. Idealism was his favorite philosophical enemy. He struggled with Royce's absolute for years and covered many pages with notes and arguments, until eventually he thought he saw a way of answering Royce and of escaping the peril.

31. Royce's Absolute.--Josiah Royce was an understudy of James and also friend, colleague, and neighbor for thirty years. James felt he was a gallant, high-minded companion-at-arms in the moral struggle, and the most formidable representative of the enemy philosophy--the hardly-to-be-resisted champion of monism and rationalism.<sup>97</sup> Royce held an absolute, enveloping mind, a universal consciousness, which, possessing as its own both the finite mind's idea and that idea's object, can

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95 R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 543.

96 Ibid., I, 797-810.

97 Ibid., I, 810-824.

by its fiat make the first the object of the second and the second the object of the first. James viewed this idea with deep misgivings, since he saw a Universal Mind would be the logical outcome, and this would be monism, a doctrine altogether intolerable on moral grounds as disparaging the individual and denying freedom. Unable to answer it for many years, James finally thought he scored. He argued that Royce first presupposes facts which fall outside of human experience, and then introduces the Absolute to experience them, whereas a good idealist should have excluded such humanly inexperienced facts from the outset. "It is but a charming romantic sketch, full of inconsistencies and looseness of thought,"<sup>98</sup> was his conclusion.

32. Hegel's rationalism.--Hegel was, of course, singled out as the arch-exponent of systematic rationalism in James's monistic sense--of the philosophy which explains parts by wholes. He fought Hegelianism tooth and nail for decades. "The 'through-and-through' universe seems to suffocate me with its infallible, impeccable, all-pervasiveness."<sup>99</sup> Despite his early and lasting dislike of its form, James continued his study of the Hegelian philosophy intermittently throughout his life, with what was on the whole increasing respect and admiring dissent. He opposed it because he felt that this doctrine

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<sup>98</sup> Henry James, Letters of William James, II, 113-4, Jan. 17, 1900.

<sup>99</sup> R. B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 725.

paralyzed the moral will. It encouraged men to see the world good rather than to make it good. It was viewed as a false and dangerous doctrine working upon the youth of his day, and James characterized it as "sterile, sanctimonious, rotten, and charlatanish."<sup>100</sup> "Hegel's conception of the absolute should be taken merely hypothetically as one of the great types of cosmic vision."<sup>101</sup>.

33. Significance of his battles with idealism.--Opposing absolute idealism tended to confirm James in his own doctrines of a finite God, empiricism, freedom, voluntarism, fideism, and phenomenism. In avoiding the monism of the Hegelians and others, he tended to fall into the opposite extreme, and readily to welcome with open arms an evolutionary world, free, unfinished, bounding and unbounded, without any unifying purpose or destiny. He had recourse to a pluralistic universe where the parts simply join together to form the whole and create their own unities in experience, with man in the process living a life of happy-go-lucky, Stevensonian adventuresomeness.

34. Confirmation from Bergson.--The most important philosophical and personal attachment of James's later years was with Henri Bergson with whom he corresponded for ten years and also met personally in Europe in 1905.<sup>102</sup> James felt that he had found in Bergson a kindred spirit. He highly applauded

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., I, 727.

<sup>101</sup> William James, A Pluralistic Universe, 98-100, 104, 107-8.

<sup>102</sup> Perry, Thought and Character of William James, II, 599-617.

Bergson's work Evolution Creatrice: "He has killed the beast INTELLECTUALISM dead."<sup>103</sup> He liked Bergson's spirit and method in philosophy:

"How good it is sometimes simply to break away from all the old categories, deny old wornout beliefs, and restate things ab initio, making the lines of division fall into entirely new places."<sup>104</sup>

James and Bergson had quite a few ideas and attitudes in common. According to their common creed, reality cannot be analyzed or described but only conveyed, and they both possessed a very unusual capacity to convey it. James had a "stream of conscious experience" in the mind, Bergson had a constant flux of change, the Élan vital. As Bergson wrote:

"When, under such conditions, two doctrines tend to coincide, there is a good chance that both of them are in the vicinity of the truth."<sup>105</sup>

Somewhat similar to Bergson, James's biology was profoundly Darwinian, stressing accidental origins, variations, adaptation, and survival. His world unity is in the making, and lies ahead as a goal of achievement. He thought of concepts as cuts or excerpts from the continuum of experience; Bergson saw them as instantaneous fixations of the flux. James saw in this continuity a way of coping with the hereditary diffi-

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., II, 290.

<sup>104</sup> Henry James, Letters of William James, II, 178-180. Letter to Henri Bergson, Dec. 14, 1902.

<sup>105</sup> R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, II, 615-617. Letter of Henri Bergson to James, July 20, 1905.

culties of empiricism, such as dualism, and the problem of the one and the many. Both men have the same sense of the copiousness of reality, and of the pathetic thinness of the concepts with which the human mind endeavors to represent it. They measure the adequacy of thought by the standard of intuition. For both the central problem was to reconcile the partial truth of conceptual knowledge with the fuller truth of immediacy. Truth is a "route" which man takes in traversing nature, and the routes of truth differ in the degree to which they conform to nature. It seems, however, that James received confirmation and inspiration, rather than any positive doctrine from Bergson, since he knew him only in the last ten years of his life.

35. James's contact with religion.--Oddly enough, throughout his life William James was profoundly interested in personal religious experience, and at the same time was ever opposed to any religion that was institutional and dogmatic. He inherited this attitude from his father, who lived a very moral, cultured life of inner religious experience, and starkly opposed any and all religious institutions, dogmas, and revelation. We recall his dictum to his children: "Morality is essentially self-approbation." Like father like son, William James held that the "Bible is a human book," "all religions are man-made."<sup>106</sup> He held that religions are built up around certain higher ideas, such as personal immortality, which are taken over by priests and ministers and then capitalized upon.

"What keeps religion going is something else than abstract definitions and systems of socially concatenated adjectives, and something different from faculties of theology and their professors. All these things are after-effects, secondary accretions upon a mass of concrete religious experiences connecting themselves with feeling and conduct that renew themselves in saecula saeculorum in the lives of humble private men. If you ask what these experiences are, they are conversations with the unseen, voices and visions, responses to prayer, changes of heart, deliverances from fear, inflowings, whenever certain persons set their own internal attitude in certain appropriate ways."<sup>107</sup>

James also denied the power of reason to give rational proofs of religion. Evolution had taught him: "From the order of the world there is no path to God by coercive reason, or even by strong analogy or induction."<sup>108</sup> He endorsed Kant's antinomies as valid denials of any proof for the existence of God. Thus having denied both reason and religion as valid avenues to God, James himself was hereby necessarily limited to inner experience in his knowledge of God. Quite consistently, he maintained:

"I believe that the evidence for God lies primarily in inner personal experiences."<sup>109</sup>

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106 Henry James, Letters of William James, II, 214. When asked whether the Bible was authoritative, he said: "No. No. No. It is so human a book that I don't see how belief in its divine authorship can survive the reading of it." Also found in notes for lectures at Harvard Summer School of Theology, 1902, 1906.

107 William James, Collected Essays and Reviews, 427-8.

108 Ch. II, footnote 14.

109 William James, Pragmatism, 72-73.

"Religion is what goes on in the single private man." 109

But although he credited the personal religious experience of others, he had none of his own:

"My personal position is simple. I have no living sense of commerce with a God. I envy those who have, for I know that the addition of such a sense would help me greatly. The Divine, for my active life, is limited to impersonal and abstract concepts which, as ideals, interest and determine me, but do so but faintly in comparison with what a feeling of God might effect, if I had one."<sup>110</sup>

"The value of God is as a more powerful ally of my own ideals."<sup>110</sup>

Similarly, William James had vague ideas on his own immortality. In March, 1883, he wrote to Thomas Davidson: "My own thoughts, however, have not preoccupied themselves much with the question of eternity on which you lay such stress."<sup>111</sup> Did James really believe in the immortality of the soul? It is evident that here, as in the case of the belief in God, he first defended the legitimacy of the belief, not on his own private account, but for mankind generally. In his lecture on Human Immortality he argued in 1898 that immortality was "not incompatible with the brain function theory of our present mundane consciousness," and therefore it remains an open question, neither affirmed nor denied by science.<sup>112</sup> But what of his own personal atti-

<sup>110</sup> R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, II, 354.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., I, 752.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., II, 355.



tude? He tells us that his belief was never "keen."<sup>113</sup> He was not one of those who find the thought of their own death intolerable. It was a point of James's code that a man should meet death bravely or even casually. But as he grew older he came to believe in immortality. In 1904, six years before death, he had acquired a feeling of its "probability." Although he did not feel a "rational need" of it, he felt a growing "practical need." In explaining why he was now, late in life, acquiring the belief for the first time, he said, "Because I am just getting fit to live."<sup>113</sup> It is evident that this idea of immortality never ruled his thought very forcibly, if at all. Because he personally held no institutional religion and denied the validity of reason to prove God's existence, and had no inner religious experience of his own, James was necessarily very vague on his ideas of God and immortality. These vague ideas touching God and immortality, in turn, led to vague notions of morality as an immediate consequence. With no revelation, no power to know human nature by reason, no teleology in the world, and adopting the evolutionary hypothesis of the universe, James was left with no criterion at all for morality--he had neither God, religion, personal immortality, human nature, nor finality to ground it on. Accordingly, morality, for James, is just the expedient in action: "'the right' is only the expedient in the way of our behaving."<sup>114</sup>

<sup>113</sup> ibid., II, 355-356.

<sup>114</sup> William James, Pragmatism, 222.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ELEMENTS AND SCOPE OF JAMES'S PRAGMATISM

1. The problem of Pragmatism's origin.--The main problem of this study is to establish the origin of Pragmatism in William James. In the two previous chapters we have seen the many mental traits and attitudes found in his mind, the broad, irregular cosmopolitan development of his thought, his bounding neurasthenic energy and activity, his voracious reading, his extreme mobility of thought and disposition, and his psychological genius. We have also tried to trace the origins of many of his ideas, which is a rather involved task in the case of any philosophy professor's mind, but especially so when he is reputed to be the most widely read philosopher of his day. It remains to indicate how these ideas and their sources gave rise to Pragmatism. By way of introduction to this specific problem, let us glance at the daily environment in which James lived, an environment of volatile change which resulted in a new industrial society.

2. The American environment 1860-1910.--The life span of William James runs along parallel with America's growing fortunes from the Civil to the First World War, from 1842 to 1910. As a youth of nineteen at Harvard, James began to witness the "Irrepressible Conflict," the saving of the Union,

the doom of slavery, and the slow, painful reconstruction of the South.<sup>1</sup> From 1860 to 1890 he was living in the era of the great western frontier, and he lived to see the old romantic "wild-west" of the mining and cattle kingdoms flourish and fade.<sup>2</sup> He watched the transcontinental railroads span the country, and dot the land with new cities in the west.<sup>3</sup> Then followed the organization of a dozen new states. He also watched the application of machine power to mass production, the rise of big business, and the great industrial corporations.<sup>4</sup> Millions of European immigrants began to settle in the eastern cities, labor in the new iron and steel industries, or make the western trek to found new homesteads.<sup>5</sup> When James finally wrote Pragmatism in 1907, Teddy Roosevelt was in the political saddle administering the "Rule of the Big Stick," and America had become the leading industrial and manufacturing power of the world.

3. The great western frontier up to 1890.—The volatile change and progress of America, registering particularly in the ebb and flow of western frontier activity, is of some importance as the broad, general environment of James's life.

1 Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steel Commager, The Growth of the American Republic, Oxford U. Press, N.Y., 1930, 615-631, 632-651.

2. Ibid., 652-670.

3 Ibid., 671-685.

4 Ibid., 686-701.

5 Ibid., 702-723.

American Pragmatism arose in this atmosphere and is singularly adapted to fit this people. A more exact approximation of the scope and degree of change in James's America is therefore worth noting. By 1890 James had witnessed the passing of the American western frontier--<sup>6</sup> those 1500 miles of prairie and semi-arid plain sloping gradually to the towering ranges of the Rocky Mountains. At first millions of buffalo were roaming the Great Plain under the rule of the red-skin. Then the miners and their frontier familiarized the American people with the country between the Missouri River and the Pacific, and advertised its magnificent resources. Ten million acres of land were staked out in homesteads. The wild Indians numbering some 225,000 were gradually disappearing, and were replaced by the American cowboy and the cattle king; and the great buffalo range became the cattle kingdom. This great western movement constituted approximately one-third of the United States, the last and most picturesque American frontier. What marked the end of the mining and cattle kingdoms and the great "wild west" was the irrepressible pressure of the farmers, swarming by the hundreds of thousands out onto the high plains and into the mountain valleys, subduing this wilderness of prairie and mountain land to cultivation and civilization.

4. The western-frontier attitude of mind.--The frontier of James's day was a safety-valve for economic unrest; it was a

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6 Ibid., Ch. XXXVII, "The passing of the Frontier," 652-670.

social laboratory; and it was a psychological attitude or state of mind. There was "release" by the west. Often it meant release from wage-slavery, inhibitions, and maladjustment, a chance to be a man among men, to live in the great outdoors, and grow up with a new country. Often too, it meant the exchange of an ordered, civilized, neighborly community with hard-won standards of propriety, for primitive conditions, an unequal contest with the wilderness, with loneliness, fear, and disease.<sup>7</sup> William James himself was not rough-hewn for pioneering; to break new pathways into the West and to wrest a living from the soil did not attract him. The day and the temper of the age, however, registered in his mind, and he lived to capture both the surface of American life and some of its under-currents in his pragmatic philosophy.

5. The great railroad era.--The miner, the cowboy, the cattle king, and the mid-western farmer represent one side of James's changing, robust America. The building of transcontinental railroads, however, put an entirely different face upon the situation.<sup>8</sup> Gradually the railroads were crossing the continent along half a dozen lines. There were 35,000 miles of steam railway in the United States in 1865 when James was a student at Harvard; in 1900 when James was planning Pragmatism, with just under 200,000 miles in operation, this country had a

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7 Ibid., 652-670.

8 Ibid., Ch. XXXVIII, "Transportation and its Control," 671-685.

greater railway mileage than all Europe. The railroads were building cities and creating whole new territories: the Dakotas, Cheyenne, Council Bluffs, Kansas City, St. Paul, Portland, and Seattle were completely dependent on the roads. In twenty years immigration was to reach a total of over eight million;<sup>9</sup> as immigrants settled in the west, King Cotton's crown in the south was gradually passing over to King Wheat in the mid-west.<sup>10</sup> But railroading was the biggest business of a big era.

6. The new industrial age.--This new era was marked by the application of machine power, in constantly increasing units and over a widely expanded area, to the processes of industry and of agriculture.<sup>11</sup> A transportation system adequate to the needs of an industrial nation was the key; mass production was the result, and industrial America arose. James watched a wide application of science, invention, and water power to new processes and in new regions. Andrew Carnegie, the great iron-master, with a triumph of engineering and technical skill, science and business enterprise, produced from his mills a new age of steel. There was also a mechanization of the farm to a point where successful agriculture was gradually becoming an

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9 Ibid., Ch. XL, "Labor and Immigration," 702-723.

10 Ibid., Ch. XLI, "Agriculture Since the War," 724-735.

11 Ibid., Ch. XXXIX, "The Economic Revolution," 686-701.

aspect of big business. Farming as a way of life began to give way to farming as a business. Big business and high finance slowly gave birth to a new American ideal and a new way of life. America accepted the new industrial order with its social inroads and its own peculiar temper.

"It was a time of hideous architecture, a time when thought and learning paused; without music, without poetry, without beauty in their lives and impulses, a whole people, full of the native energy and strength of lives lived in a new land, rushed pell-mell into a new age."<sup>12</sup>

7. Pragmatism fits the American environment.--Within this changing, industrial cycle, William James the philosophically untrained Harvard professor, broad traveller over Europe and America, weaned on Darwin's Origin of Species, Spencer's Evolution, and British empiricism, helped to give birth to the modern movement, Pragmatism--a movement, as James says, "that suddenly seems to have precipitated itself out of the air."<sup>13</sup> His was to be a philosophy identified with "the concrete parts of life; a philosophy shaped to fit this colossal universe of concrete facts, their awful bewilderingments, their surprises and cruelties, the wildness which they show";<sup>14</sup> A philosophy whose working method is to determine what practical difference truths make in concrete daily life. The only test of truth is to

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 697-698.

<sup>13</sup> William James, Pragmatism, preface, vii.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 22.

trace a concrete consequence. James played the philosophical game with amateur audacity and professional skill, with his ear to the ground sounding out most of the steps as he went along. The American theatre that James knew was vast, and American resources boundless. There was a native utilitarian element that permeated the American environment. Even before publication, James was certain that Pragmatism as a movement would prosper in such a robust, burly world.<sup>15</sup>

8. Pragmatism a result of agnostic currents of philosophical history.--The indirect origin of Pragmatism can be seen in the agnostic trends of modern philosophy, consequent upon David Hume. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, in their combined attacks upon human knowledge, led the way to the ultimate denial of abstraction, substance, causality, and the power of reason to arrive at the intrinsic nature of reality; in place of abstraction, substance, causality, and reason was substituted sense empiricism. In such a system, however, the actual continued existence of life's higher ideas touching God, morality, immortality, freedom, and religion demanded a new current of philosophy whose working method would be one of belief, because neither reason nor sense empiricism could support them. The necessity of a complementary fideism is evidently intrinsic to British empiricism. Immanuel Kant accepted this problem,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 123.



reaffirmed the limitations of sense empiricism as the only possible avenue to reality, denied reason's power to prove either God's existence or the existence of the human soul, and substituted a voluntarism of "Practical Reason." In this way, God, the human soul, immortality, freedom, and morality became postulates or beliefs for practical daily life. When reason was attacked and declined, religious dogma underwent a parallel decline under similar agnostic attacks, because it was unsupported by reason and unable to be proved by sensistic arguments; moreover, it constantly suffered from protestant private interpretation. Afterwards in the latter half of the 19th century, both religion and philosophy underwent a further revolutionary change under the impetus of scientific criticism, evolution, and the materialistic interpretation of the law of the conservation of energy. "Scientific" materialism flatly denied a spiritual God, a spiritual soul, and human immortality. By 1900 the sensistic school of British empiricism was closely allied to science in spirit and in method, and was gradually absorbing evolution and biology. Man came to be known as an evolved organism with currents of sensations in his mind for adapting him to his environment. Reason, abstraction, substance, and causality were practically eliminated, and religious dogma and practice were in full decline. The victorious agnostic currents of sense empiricism, evolution, relativistic knowledge, and scientific materialism were in ascendancy, and awaited

synthesis in a new theory of knowledge or a truth-formula suitable to the agnostic and scientific temper of the day. William James, the practical psychologist, adapted Pragmatism to this situation.

9. James approaches the problem.--The origin of Pragmatism in the mind of William James is largely a study of how a doctor with a scientific temper of mind and a certain genius for practical psychology absorbed these agnostic currents and combined them into a simple, pragmatic truth-formula. Once the formula was made, he gave it as a simple mental prescription to the people of his day. His truth-formula answered the practical necessity of life and action in the dynamic, changing world where science, evolution, religion, industry, and government all interact and to a certain extent conflict with one another. Pragmatism is proposed as a simple way of retaining what is best in each of them.

"I offer the oddly-named thing Pragmatism as a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demand. It can remain religious like the rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts."<sup>16</sup>

"It preserves a cordial relation with facts, and unlike Spencer's philosophy, it neither begins nor ends by turning positive religious constructions out of doors--it treats them cordially as well."<sup>17</sup>

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16 William James, Pragmatism, 33.

17 Ibid., 40.

"I hope I may lead you to find it just the mediating way of thinking that you require."<sup>17</sup>

"You see already how democratic she is. Her manners are as various and flexible, her resources as rich and endless, and her conclusions as friendly as those of mother nature."<sup>18</sup>

It can be seen that James wished to design Pragmatism as neither rigidly scientific nor rigidly philosophical; he combines elements of both, along with a certain humanity and a profound psychological spirit of adapting ideas to the mind of the people. James was a humane literary man, a social figure, cultured traveler, doctor of medicine, professor of physiology and philosophy; but most fundamental of all, he was ever a practical psychologist.

10. Three direct sources of Pragmatism in James.--The direct causes of Pragmatism can be traced to three sources: 1) James's environment, 2) the temperament and attitudes of the man himself, and 3) his philosophical ideas. We have seen that Pragmatism evolved in an American environment of volatile change, and that it was published in 1907 in a new era of industrial society at a time when America became the leading industrial nation of the world. James had the mind of an explorer given to dangerous living. He had a singular zest for life in a free and open world with no restrictions save bounding action itself, and his philosophical outlook tended to be

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 81.

the expression of his entire personality. His characteristic attitudes are the following:

"Philosophy like life must keep the doors and windows open."<sup>19</sup>

"I think that the center of my whole Anschauung. . . has been the belief that something is doing in the universe, and that novelty is real. . . Everything happens in the middle of eternality. All days are judgment days and creation morns."<sup>19</sup>

"If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success, it is no better than a game of private theatricals from which one may withdraw at will. But it FEELS like a real fight--as if something really wild were in the universe which we, with all our idealities and faithfulnesses, are needed to redeem."<sup>20</sup>

A Pragmatism of relative truth, belief, and action fitted James's mind exactly. He had nothing to lose; no religious institutions, no dogma, no revelation, no infinite God, no soul, no morality, and only the vague possibility of an after-life. Accordingly, James approached the agnostic currents of philosophy and science with a romantic, adventurous mind and a singular zest for living; he ever looked forward to the future, not the past, and professed a gospel of belief and action, and "truth" for what it is worth to you. He is a buoyant, electric spirit in a material, agnostic world.

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<sup>19</sup> W.G. Muellder and L. Sears, Development of American Philosophy, Houghton, Mifflin Co., N.Y., 1940, 313.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 314.

11. The philosophical ideas that led to Pragmatism.---

Pragmatism as a philosophy is the culmination of many tendencies in James, and was drawn from at least seven sources:

1. From Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, James came to reject, on the one hand, reason, abstraction, and substance; he accepted on the other hand, Locke's "nominal essence" and the foundation of more perfect knowledge in the sense intuition of particulars. Sensistic empiricism became the basis of pragmatic philosophy, to which James added an active mind that faces experience with its own interests, temperament, and action.
2. From Renouvier and Kant, James came to reject all proofs of the existence of God by reason, and absorbed Renouvier's empiricism, the will to believe, freedom, pluralism, fideism, phenomenism, and a finite God, as the complement to the limitations of empiricism.
3. Darwin and Spencer gave James his fundamental view of an evolutionary world, his universe "still in the making" where every day is creation morn. He rejected teleology; because of evil and evolutionary change he accepted a finite God, who is not all-powerful or omniscient. Darwin and Spencer also gave James a part of his fundamental view of man and relative knowledge. Man is an evolved organism that faces the future and seeks adaptation to his environment.
4. James's biological studies, embracing anatomy and the physiology of the senses and the nervous system, helped to give him his biological theory of consciousness, and part of his fundamental focus on life. Man is an evolved organism with a biological addition of consciousness for adaptation.

5. Psychology gave James an authoritative knowledge of psychic states of mind, which became his fundamental approach to everything in life. He always tended to make a psychological diagnosis and then write a mental prescription for the world. He developed his "stream of consciousness" theory where there is no soul, and the thinker is the thought. This he attached to man the organism. From Renouvier and psychology, he interpreted philosophy in terms of temperament and will. "Human motives sharpen all our questions, human satisfactions lurk in all our answers, all our formulas have a human twist."<sup>21</sup>
  
6. Hodgson preceded James with the "stream of consciousness," and rooted James's empiricism in experience. "What shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience."<sup>22</sup>
  
7. Peirce, in trying to make his concepts clear by verification in experience, gave James the root-idea which lay in the back of his mind for twenty years, and then came to the fore, with a little readjustment, as the truth-formula of Pragmatism: Truth is determined by its consequences; truth is verified by action in experience. This idea is also quite similar to the scientific method of hypothesis followed by verification. James however, attributes the source of his pragmatic idea to Peirce and Hodgson.

12. The pragmatic theory of knowledge.--After thus experiencing the blows and buffets of the agnostic philosophical world for forty-five years, James finally cast his eye upon the frame of things and wrote his own Pragmatism in 1907,

<sup>21</sup> William James, Pragmatism, 242.

<sup>22</sup> Muelder-Sears, Development of American Philosophy, 313.

three years before he died. Pragmatism fundamentally turns upon a theory of knowledge, a truth-formula, or method. This truth-formula is based upon the rejection of reason, abstraction, substance, and absolute truth, and the acceptance of intuition and sensation as the basis of knowledge. The mind is active and "chooses" what shall stand for an object; it forms hypotheses or ideas and tries to verify them by action in experience. Since there are no absolute truths or eternal essences in an evolutionary world, the mind is made primarily, not for contemplation, but for action into its environment. An idea is just a middle term between sensation and action. By hypothesis and verification, a man gains a clearer and closer approximation of the "truth" found in his environment. Each man is the real arbiter of his own ideas; he is the agent who actively chooses and fashions his ideas according to his temperament, his interests, his will to adapt himself more perfectly to his environment. Knowledge, therefore, has an objective and a subjective aspect: the objective aspect considers the stream of sensations running through the mind which constitute conscious experience. The subjective aspect is the mind's activity, cutting out a portion of the stream of experience, choosing its ideas, forming its hypotheses for action, and verifying them concretely in experience by success in action. Since there is no absolute truth and each individual has his own biology, his own temperament, his own interests

and will, truth is just what it is worth to him, and morality is the expedient in action. The truth in a man's mind is simply determined by its consequences in experience.

13. The verification of ideas in experience.--Pragmatism is a very simple theory of knowledge. It says truth is determined by its consequences; either an idea works in experience or it does not. Any adaptation, any adjustment, any workability suffices. If an idea works for you in the environment, it is true for you; if it does not work, change it for a better one. James fundamentally views man here as an evolved organism that has somehow gained a biological addition of consciousness. There is no teleology in the world, no higher destiny for man that is known for certain. Each individual is just an organism with his own biology, his own consciousness, his own temperament, interests and will, progressively learning to adapt himself better and better to his environment. All reality is just an experience for the organism. Progressively, a man makes his own ideas work in his surroundings. He gains greater and greater control and mastery of nature. There is no absolute verification of these ideas because each man has his own temperament, his acquired interests may change, or the evolutionary universe may further evolve. Consequently, what is true for a man today may have to be changed tomorrow because of new conditions or new interests. Every idea that works in some way "is true so far forth." Better working ideas



give a better adaptation, control, and mastery of environment. To this extent, they are a closer approximation of "the truth."

14. The psychological view of truth.---James's psychological view of truth is simply based upon the psychological fact that each individual mind has its own individual way of thinking and gradually acquires its own subjective view of the universe. The objectivity of knowledge tends to be minimized when evolution is adopted and substance rejected, because this allows only sense knowledge of an evolving universe to enter the mind. From Renouvier, James derived the idea that all philosophies are so many products of human temperament and will. Since this is true, Pragmatism takes them for what they are worth.

"What the system pretends to be is a picture of the great universe of God. What it is--and oh so flagrantly!-- is the revelation of how intensely odd the personal flavor of some fellow creature is."<sup>23</sup>

"Almost every one has his own peculiar sense of a certain total character in the universe, and of the inadequacy fully to match it of the peculiar systems that he knows. They don't just cover HIS world."<sup>24</sup>

"So many rival formulations are proposed in all the branches of science that investigators have become accus-

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23 William James, Pragmatism, 36.

24 Ibid., 37.

tomed to the notion that no theory is absolutely a transcript of reality, but that any one of them may from some point of view be useful. Their great use is to summarize old facts and to lead to new ones. They are only a man-made language, a conceptual short-hand, as some one calls them, in which we write our reports of nature."<sup>25</sup>

"Any idea upon which we can ride, so to speak; any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part, linking this satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor; is true for just so much, true so far forth, true instrumentally."<sup>26</sup>

Accordingly, James disavows entirely any attempt to get a veracious picture of the world in itself, and makes of ideas instruments for the exploration of, and mastery over, the world, rather than copies of it.

15. The experiential, prospective philosophy.--Pragmatism is made for action into experience. It is an experiential philosophy:

"The only things which shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience."<sup>27</sup>

It is a prospective, forward-looking philosophy:

"It looks away from first things, principles, categories, and looks towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts."<sup>28</sup>

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25 William James, Pragmatism, 56-57.

26 Ibid., 58.

27 Muellder-Sears, Development of American Philosophy, 313.

28 William James, Pragmatism, 51.

Concepts or beliefs are not copies or exact reports of any external situation. They are tools to be used. "We harness perceptual reality in concepts in order to drive it better to our ends."<sup>29</sup> The meaning of an idea consists solely in the particular consequences to which it leads. The only differences that can be detected between consequences are the differences that they make in action. Ideas must have consequences; some consequences are better for you than others.

16. The scope of pragmatism as a philosophy.--What happens when the simple pragmatic truth-formula is applied to the whole of life? James's answer is the following. Granting the basic empirical foundation which holds that sensation and the intuition of particulars is primary human knowledge, Pragmatism's first requisite is human freedom. The active mind must be free to choose its ideas, to fashion its hypotheses. Truth and error, the very workability and unworkability of ideas in experience presupposes freedom. If man is determined, his ideas work just one way. Freedom cannot be fully proved, but is rather an object of faith. A man must "will to believe" in freedom because of its consequences. Without it, he is suffocated by iron-bound determinism. With the belief in freedom, however, man gives free-play to his moral interests and higher sentiments. Every man is thereby given

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29 William James, A Pluralistic Universe, 340.

a wide-open world of adventure. Freedom, in turn, involves a pluralistic world, or a pluralistic universe, wherein the part is prior to the whole, and the parts simply run together to make their own unities. As James writes, "Pluralism and indeterminism seem to be but two ways of saying the same thing."<sup>30</sup> The alternative of a monistic world wherein the parts are wholly determined by the whole is an outright denial of freedom, and then there is "not one free wiggle in the universe." There can be no Absolute that determines the universe through-and-through, for this is iron-bound determinism and freedom is entirely lost. The pluralistic universe is simply a "given" wherein the parts run together to form a whole. Where it comes from is no matter; pragmatic philosophy is prospective and looks ever forward. This world receives its best interpretation in the evolutionary theory. There is always something doing in the universe, for there is something really wild within the universe; novelty, change, evolution are real. "Everything happens in the middle of eternity. All days are judgment days and creation morns."<sup>31</sup> Man, in this evolutionary universe, is an evolved biological organism, and by means of his consciousness he can adapt himself to his environment. All his truths are relative to his control and mastery of the surrounding environment. His

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<sup>30</sup> William James, letter to Renouvier, London, Dec. 6, 1882. Quoted by R. B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, I, 686.

<sup>31</sup> Muelder-Sears, Development of American Philosophy, 313-314.

morals are just the expedient in action. He looks ever forward, his outlook is ever prospective. He cannot prove his soul, his immortality, God's existence, or any religious ideas. He can gain a "feeling" for them, and then "will to believe" them because of what they can do for him, by arousing his higher interests and moral sentiments. If desirable ideas cannot be proved by reason or sensation, the door is always left open to hold them by faith. Faith is a readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance. This constitutes the "will to believe." There are issues where faith creates its own verification. Belief in success helps success. The optimistic insistence that this is the kind of universe where men may stake their very lives in the attempt to realize some dream of beauty or truth, some worthwhile success or progress, is faith and religion. It is not that this is the kind of world that is good, but that it is the sort of place in which men have a real chance to make it good. This is an adventurous, human religion, a finite rather non-deistic religion demanding courage as well as faith. Since all religions are man-made, the idea is to make one that helps man to live life well. In attaining to God reason is useless; the only possible contact with God is by personal religious experience. God, if there be a God, is outside the world and finite, neither all-powerful nor omniscient. Pragmatism thus endorses religion, but so far, does not know which religion will work best for man in the long run.

## CHAPTER IV

### AN HISTORICAL CRITICISM OF PRAGMATISM IN JAMES

1. The problem of criticism in the origin of James's Pragmatism.--This study has been concerned primarily with the origin of Pragmatism in the mind of William James, showing where he derived his ideas and how his environment and his own mental traits contributed to his philosophy of Pragmatism. It is not so much an investigation of what Pragmatism is, as rather a genetic study of its origin and historical evolution. This short criticism, consequently, is concerned primarily with Pragmatism's historical genesis in James's mind, and only secondarily with an appreciation of the possible merits or demerits of Pragmatism considered objectively in itself.

2. Pragmatism the low-point of reason.--Strangely enough, Pragmatism keeps the tone, the language, and to a certain extent the spirit of philosophy and is to a large extent engendered out of philosophical currents of the past; yet in itself, Pragmatism is basically and professedly non-rational, and "looks away from first things, principles, categories, and looks toward last things, fruits, consequences, facts."<sup>1</sup> Objectively speaking, it is the low-point of reason, the specific rejection of the major instrument of philosophy; yet historically speaking, it is the natural

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<sup>1</sup> William James, Pragmatism, 51.

result of agnostic currents in philosophy.

3. Pragmatism consistent with its foundations.--In point of fact, James did not set the stage or lay the foundations upon which Pragmatism is built. Upon reading modern philosophy, he found reason bankrupt and in a state of disrepute, because of the critical work of Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Renouvier, and others. James, much like Descartes, synthesized already existing ideas and tendencies of his time. Evolution was not the brain-child of James; Darwin and Spencer, rather, are responsible for the evolutionary view of the cosmos. Kant and Renouvier, not James, are the sources of practical voluntarism, fideism, and the interpretation of philosophy as a product of will and temperament. For several centuries before James, religious faith, dogma, and practice had been suffering from critical attacks, from agnosticism, and from private interpretation. Pragmatism is definitely founded on religious scepticism and philosophical agnosticism. If religions are just man-made, if reason can establish neither God's existence, substance, the human soul, immortality, freedom, nor morality, Pragmatism is perhaps the most consistent formula for living in the world, facing squarely the existing rational and religious bankruptcy. Man is then just a stray organism in an unintelligible world. Then quite consistently, truth "is what it is worth to you"; morality is only the expedient in action. Without objective truth or true religion, Pragmatism is perhaps

the right answer for action in the world here and now. When there is, however, either a valid objective truth, or a true revelation, or one universal God-given religion, then Pragmatism is definitely the wrong answer. Pragmatism stands or falls on its foundations of the bankruptcy of reason and religion; its foundations are either true or false.

4. James's ignorance of true religion.--The question arises, was James spiritually blind of deliberate purpose, or was he just ignorant of the power and significance of true religion? Most readers who intimately study the works of James conclude that in general he is sincere through and through. Those who knew the man personally never doubted his sincerity. From childhood to the grave, his attitude toward religion was consistently the same: no divine revelation, no institutional religion, just individual religious experiences. Through the years James accepted religion as a historic human fact. He always credited personal religious experience, even though he had none himself. He held justification of belief by subjective need, and the reservation of religious belief for the moments when this need is most extreme. In 1876, he wrote this confession: <sup>2</sup>

"The hardness of my Stoicism oppresses me sometimes. My attitude towards religion is one of deference rather than adoption. I see its place; I feel that there are times when every-

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<sup>2</sup> R.B. Perry, Thought and Character of William James, II, 353.



thing else was to fail and that, or nothing, remain; and yet I behave as if I must leave it untouched until such time comes, and I am drawn to it by sheer stress of weather. I am sure I am partly right, and that religion is not an every day comfort and convenience. And yet I know I am partly wrong."

His interpretation of evolution, biology, and psychology tended to place primary emphasis on adaptation to environment here and now; the future life was always an open question. Religion, to James, is always just a practical instrument to be used. When he wrote his classic psychological study, "The Varieties of Religious Experience", his consistent premise throughout the book is that religions are man-made, and valuable so far forth. Even this intimate study of numerous cases of religious experience did not turn his mind from his fundamental viewpoint of denying dogma and institutional religion. By 1900, his primary interest in this study apparently was not to find God, but rather to justify religious experiences as realities, and to investigate them in terms of psychological states of mind and their physiological accompaniments. Far from trying to destroy religion, however, he took it as his great mission in life to save religion without alienating science. He valued personal religious experiences for what they could do for man, and wanted to safe-guard them against the inroads of scientific materialism of his day.

5. James rejects reason.--The second foundation of Pragmatism

is a thoroughgoing philosophical agnosticism or the rejection of reason. Was James subjectively justified in his rejection of reason? This is a difficult question to answer. In the light of the available evidence, however, it seems that he was unable to do otherwise. From the outset, the free and liberal atmosphere of combative ideas fostered by his father made him ever prone to unorthodoxy. James himself had no formal metaphysical training, nor for that matter, any formal training in philosophy. His first contact with science and philosophy was to absorb Darwin and Spencer, and as a result his mind was warped from the beginning by cosmic evolution and relative truth. Trained as a physiologist, James next came into contact with Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, together with their sensistic empiricism, nominal essences, and their tirades against abstraction and scholasticism. Immersed in these currents of modern philosophy, he proceeded on to Kant. He rejected the categories, not on metaphysical grounds, but rather on psychological grounds, as being artificial, "mythological machine-shop." But he accepted Kant's sensistic antinomies and critique of the proofs for the existence of God, as have most non-scholastic modern philosophers who have an inadequate metaphysics. It would seem that William James could not accurately distinguish truth from error in Locke, Hume, and Kant without antecedently having a true metaphysics and an adequate theory of knowledge of his own. Their arguments against substance, abstraction, and reason seemed adequate and conclusive

to him. Evolution, nominal essences, and the physiology of the nervous system of man, are not facile leads into an unknown and rejected doctrine of substance and valid objective truth. Then too, James was a philosopher of temperament, half scientist and half crusader, with an extremely mobile disposition and a buoyant spirit. Temperamentally, he was ill-suited to probe very far into the depths of philosophy and to rest satisfied in an abstract philosophy of "a finished, ready-made universe." His tendency was to crusade on the surface of life. This tendency was strengthened further and intensified by the fact that he himself had a certain genius for catching insights into psychic states of mind, and for conveying these insights to people in a concrete experiential philosophy. Following the line of agnosticism from Locke, Hume, and Kant, James came to reject reason itself as quite powerless, and this became the fundamental basis of his Pragmatism. Here too, is found his mission in life: with reason powerless, to save religion and the higher ideas of God's existence, immortality, freedom, and morality from the negations of science. When materialistic science denied these higher ideas, James wrote three books, Human Immortality, The Will to Believe, and Varieties of Religious Experience to show on the one hand, that science could neither prove nor disprove these issues, and to show on the other hand, the reality of free will and religious experience concretely in practical daily life. Immortality remained an open question. Pragmatism itself was designed as a meliorating

way of thinking, at once cordially conversant with scientific facts and not turning religious constructions out of doors. Evidently, James tenaciously desired to hold these higher religious ideas, but consistently denied reason's power to prove them, because of his inherited philosophical tradition. With reason and religion bankrupt, Pragmatism is the story of agnosticism, evolution, biology, and psychology together inundating the philosophical field, and giving a new, non-rational orientation to ideas of the universe, man, and God.

5. An estimate of James.---Fundamentally, sincere philosophers think as they can. If a philosopher absorbs a tradition that rejects reason and abstraction, he must necessarily use another medium if he will continue to philosophize at all. Accordingly, James found it necessary to use a thorough-going sense empiricism and psychology as his philosophical method. He can either be dismissed with a wave of the hand as non-philosophical, because he rejects reason, the major instrument of philosophy, and "looks away from first things, principles, categories"; or he can be seen as just another case study in the long history of philosophy, a specimen of what happens when a man with a genius for descriptive psychology enters the field of pure philosophy and reason. Both of these are true aspects of William James the philosopher, but neither of these views is an adequate estimate of James. While James may be blandly dismissed as non-philosophical, twentieth-century

America is pervaded through and through with his pragmatic philosophy. If his philosophy perhaps is curiously scrutinized as an odd type of psychologism in the history of philosophy, yet his thought has given rise, nevertheless, to a vigorous pragmatic movement in philosophy for fifty years; his writing is regarded as highly refreshing and stimulating to twentieth-century American life; his applied psychology has given rise to the present major psychological movement in American education; and his image of human nature as an organism with a biological addition of consciousness for adapting man to his environment is largely the prevalent view taken of man in the United States today. Rejecting reason and abstract philosophy, James exercised his psychological power of absorbing the trends of his age and adapted the contemporary empiricism, evolution, biology, psychology, and Kantian practical idealism to the needs of modern industrial life. His psychological power of fashioning his thought into a simple truth-formula and his power of writing a simple, concrete experiential philosophy for the people, have made pragmatic views and interpretations of the physical world, man, and God regnant in America, especially when coupled with the instrumentalism, positivism, and sociology of John Dewey. Scholastic philosophers, meanwhile, have retained the precision of abstraction and reason, and continue to teach in the schools a philosophy far superior to Pragmatism. But it tends, by and large, to be a philosophy of abstract principles, and to remain largely unapplied to

individual and social life in industrial America. This perhaps, is the real significance of William James. With far less than scholasticism has to offer, he has done far more to influence America. He absorbed and formulated along individualistic lines the trends of his age; and with a certain psychological genius he came to view the whole of life--the evolving physical world, man and human society, religion and God--as a pragmatic, psychological experience for each individual. This he fashioned into an empirical and experiential philosophy, fundamentally based on psychic states and their physiological accompaniments.

6. Conclusion.--As a result of this study, it has been found that William James, eminent practical psychologist, formulated Pragmatism due to the rational and religious bankruptcy of his times, and gave his pragmatic truth-formula as a prescription for the people whereby they might at once retain their religious constructions in the face of materialistic science and adapt themselves practically to life in a new industrial society. Pragmatism is agnostic, empirical, practical-minded, concrete, and looks to progress and the future. On the one hand, it is the low-point of reason, the culmination of modern philosophical trends since 1600, and on the other hand, it is peculiarly adapted to the American tempo of industrial life and the spirit of Yankee shrewdness and practical industry. By objectively valid standards, it

is patently an inadequate and false picture of man and the universe, yet it is singularly at one with the practical turn of the American temperament, and on this score, will not readily nor quickly pass from the American scene. One conclusion we might draw at the end of this study is the realization that any philosopher, whether materialist, sense empiricist, rationalist, or idealist, is bound down by the presuppositions with which he begins. If a philosopher begins with the false premises of Locke, Hume, and Kant, he is bound to wind up in something false. If philosophy is to be true in the final analysis, it must take such an approach as not to exclude the real answer. When a philosophy begins as a psychologism, it cannot validly end as a realism. At the outset it has lost the real world, it has excluded man as a real spiritual person, and it can give no adequate answer to the problems, where man came from and where he is going. From start to finish, James was bound down by his philosophical origins, and his philosophy could not but fail ultimately to explain life.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Charles A. Nash, S.J.  
has been read and approved by three members of the  
Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director  
of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies  
the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated,  
and that the thesis is now given final approval with refer-  
ence to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

July 12, 1947  
Date

Murel R. Vogel, Jr.  
Signature of Adviser