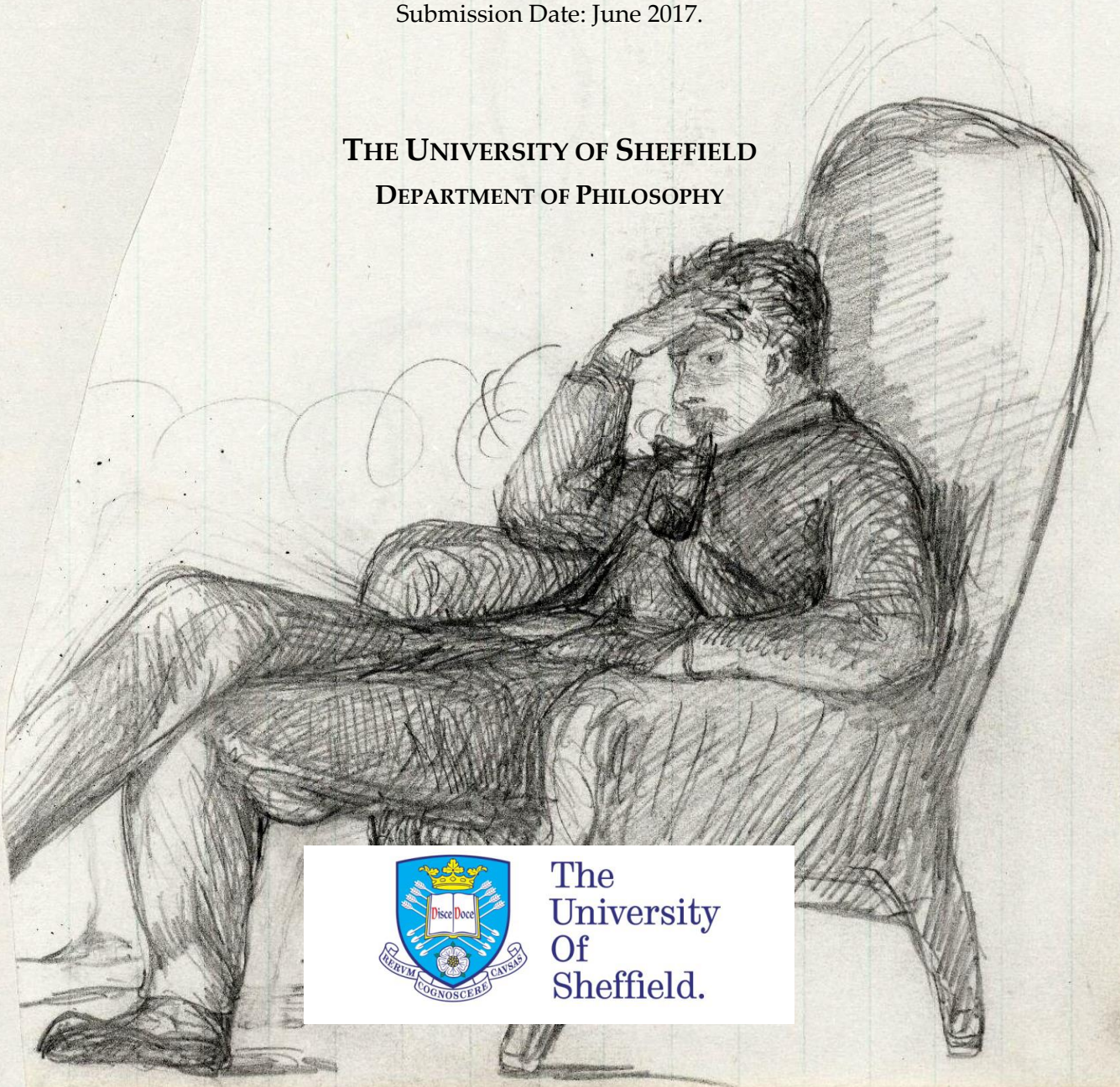# REALISM, INDIVIDUALISM, AND PLURALISM: THE METAPHYSICS AND ETHICS OF WILLIAM JAMES

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[From a note-book used in Brazil]

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

All references to William James's writings will be to the Harvard University Press collection, *The Works of William James* (19 volumes, 1975-1988). The following abbreviations will be used:

[ECR]	*Essays, Comments and Reviews*
[EPh]	*Essays in Philosophy*
[EPs]	*Essays in Psychology*
[EPR]	*Essays in Psychical Research*
[ERE]	*Essays in Radical Empiricism*
[ERM]	*Essays in Religion and Morality*
[MEN]	*Manuscripts, Essays and Notes*
[ML]	*Manuscript Lectures*
[MT]	*The Meaning of Truth*
[P]	*Pragmatism*
[PB]	*Psychology: The Briefer Course*
[PP]	*Principles of Psychology* (followed by vol. number, 1-3)
[PU]	*A Pluralistic Universe*
[SPP]	*Some Problems of Philosophy*
[TT]	*Talks to Teachers and Students*
[VRE]	*Varieties of Religious Experience*
[WB]	*The Will to Believe*

In text references will be presented using the following convention: (original year published, abbreviation of text: page number).

References to James's correspondence will be to *The Correspondence of William James* (12 volumes, 1992 – 2004). The following abbreviation will be used:

[CJW]   *The Correspondence of William James* (followed by vol. number, 1-12).

In text references will be presented using the following convention: (date letter sent, CWJ followed by volume number: page number).

References to the work of Charles S. Peirce will, when possible, be to *The Writings of Charles S. Peirce – A Chronological Edition* (6 volumes, 1976 -). The following abbreviation will be used:

[W]   *The Writings of Charles S. Peirce – A Chronological Edition* (followed by volume number, 1-6)

In text references will be presented using the following convention: (original year published, W followed by volume number: page number).

References to Peirce which cannot be found in the *Writings* will usually be to *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (8 volumes, 1958-1966). The following abbreviation will be used:

[CP]   *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce.*

In text references will be presented using the following convention: (original year published, CP followed by volume number: paragraph number).

Occasionally, Peirce references which cannot be found in either will be to *The Essential Peirce* collection. The following abbreviation will be used:

[EP]   *The Essential Peirce: Selected Writings* (followed by vol. number, 1-2)

In text references will be presented using the following convention: (original year published, EP followed by volume number: page number).

The full details of all of these collections can be found in the bibliography.

ABSTRACT

There is a growing interest, within contemporary ethical and political philosophy, in the theories of the classical American pragmatists. One of the reasons for this interest is the pragmatist's tendency to ground normative notions such as "right", "good" and "truth" within human practices, without thereby *reducing* such notions to those human practices. This thesis addresses a gap in this literature by articulating and defending an account of pragmatist ethics based in the work William James.

James is often overlooked in contemporary scholarship precisely because he appears to offer an account in which our normative notions *are* reducible to what individuals and communities happen to believe. Contrary to the majority of both contemporary and historical interpretations of James, this thesis argues that James is in fact interested in presenting a form of ethical realism. By drawing extensively from his work on ethics and other areas, especially the metaphysics which occupied his later life, this thesis argues that James can be seen as providing an objectivist and realist account of ethics, whilst at the same time maintaining a commitment to the role that individuals play within inquiry, and to pluralism about value. As such, the Jamesian approach provides an interesting alternative and addition to other contemporary approaches to pragmatist ethics.

INTRODUCTION

THE AIMS OF THE THESIS

This thesis articulates and defends an account of pragmatist ethics which is grounded in the work of the classical American pragmatist, William James. Contrary to the majority of contemporary and historical interpretations of James's work, this thesis presents the Jamesian account as entailing a certain form of realism and objectivity in ethics, whilst maintaining a commitment to value pluralism and to individuals having an important role within ethical inquiry.

Interest in the ethical work of the classical pragmatists has been growing over recent years, with most high-profile work being based on the pragmatism of Charles S. Peirce or John Dewey.[1] These two strands of work can be seen as presenting a division within contemporary pragmatism. Peircean accounts tend to present realistic and monistic accounts of ethical inquiry, whereas accounts of pragmatist ethics based on the work of Dewey tend to be more constructivist and pluralistic. Up to now, however, little contemporary work has been done elaborating the ethical thought of William James, the

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[1] For contemporary Peircean pragmatist ethics, see: Misak (1994; 2000; 2004); Talisse (2003; 2010; 2013); Talisse and Aikin (2005; 2011; 2015). For contemporary Deweyan ethics, see: Anderson (1993); Kitcher (2011; 2012); Welchman (1995; 2010).

third of the conventionally recognised classical pragmatists. This thesis aims to address this gap, and to present an account of James's ethics which is committed to the realism of Peirce, the pluralism associated with Dewey, and a kind of individualism of his own.

In presenting this account, I will have to engage with contemporary debates surrounding the validity of James's approach. Two such debates deserve special mention here, as my interpretation of James will often be formed in reaction to them. The first concerns realism. Contemporary Peirceans, represented most obviously in this thesis by the voice of Cheryl Misak, hold that there is a large separation between Jamesian pragmatism and Peircean pragmatism on the grounds of realism. Whereas Peirce is a staunch realist, James is represented as having dangerous relativistic or subjectivist tendencies. Such an interpretation goes back to Peirce himself, who separated his own account of pragmatism from other pragmatists on the grounds of realism.[2] This distinction is vitally important to discussions of pragmatist ethics. It essentially concerns whether normativity is reducible to the actual practices of individuals and communities, or these practices are held accountable to a more objective notion of normativity. I shall present an interpretation of James as a realist of the relevant kind, though I shall place distinctions between James and Peirce on other grounds, most notably in terms of individualism.

The second contemporary debate concerns the role that pluralism can play in pragmatism. Talisse and Aikin argue that *no* pragmatist can consistently be a pluralist in a moral sense, and that pragmatists must either be monists or quietists (2005; 2016). In relation to James in particular, these authors contend that James's conception of a pluralistic ethics leads to confusion and, if followed, a potentially aggressive conflict between those who hold different values (2011). As such, in defending a pluralistic version of James's ethics, I must provide an answer to Talisse and Aikin's challenge, showing both that James's pluralism does not conflict with his pragmatist commitments, and also how value pluralism does not result in negative forms of conflict between people who hold different values.[3]

TERMINOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY

In presenting a Jamesian account of pragmatist ethics, the thesis will focus on an exegesis of the main published texts in which James presents his ethical thought: *The Will to Believe*

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[2] Exploration of this separation will be the topic of Chapter I.
[3] Chapter III in particular focuses on James's pluralism.

and Other Essays (1897); *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (1899); and the papers collected in *Essays in Religion and Morality* (1884-1910). However, with the possible exception of "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" (1891), James did not anywhere articulate a definitive ethical theory, though his work on other matters frequently has ethical assumptions or outcomes. To produce a defensible Jamesian position, then, I interpret these sporadic references to a vague ethical theory through the lens of his wider work on psychology (*The Principles of Psychology* (1890)) and especially metaphysics (*Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912); *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909); *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1910)), with a view to presenting a unified position.

Ultimately this is a reconstructive project. Though I stick as closely as possible to James's texts, utilize only the philosophical resources that James provides, and adhere to James's philosophical project as I understand it, it is unlikely that the position defended in this thesis represents James's *own* position. It more likely represents a James*ian* position, and hopefully one which is more defensible against contemporary critics than the undeveloped ethics presented by James himself.

It is one of the starting assumptions of this thesis that James's philosophical work is more systematic than usually thought. James's thought has several common features which run throughout his career. One of the most important is the empiricist attempt to provide a full account of reality, morality, and epistemology, whilst only appealing to experience and experienceable entities. James consistently rejects any philosophy which appeals to a "God's-eye" view, to agencies which transcend experience, or to self-certifying propositions. Though most clearly expressed in his later metaphysical work, we find this basic project expressed in some of his earliest philosophical reflections. It is of particular importance to this thesis that the metaphysical work expresses with more clarity a general "radically" empirical project which appears in a more inchoate form in James's ethical work. By seeing how James resolves the apparent tension between his realism, individualism, and pluralism in his metaphysics, the thesis suggests that the same can be done in James's ethics.

When talking about "realism" in this thesis, I shall defer to Peirce's definition. According to Peirce, the real is "that whose characters are independent of what anybody may think them to be", and is the object which is represented by that "opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate" (1878, W3: 271-273). It is worth noting that *all* pragmatists tie notions such as reality, truth, and rightness to the practices of actual inquiring beings. The "real" defined in this way does not have to be independent of *all* thought, but only independent of "how you, or I, or any number of men think" and so independent of "all that is arbitrary and individual in thought" (1871, W2: 467-9).[4] When

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[4] See Peirce 1909, CP6.453 for a later expression of the same view. Chapter I will explore this notion of realism in more depth, specifically with reference to realism about generals (I.6).

talking about "subjectivism" in this thesis, I will be referring to the opposing theory that notions such as reality, truth, and morality have no reference or validity outside of how you, or I, or any number of people *happen* to think.

Whether or not James is a realist in *this* sense is at the heart of the currently expressed divide between James and Peirce. Misak claims that it is James's "radical subjectivism" which is "at the heart of the dispute between James and Peirce" (Misak, 2013: 60). Whereas all pragmatists, when giving an account of normativity, must refer to practices of human inquiry, the subjective pragmatist *reduces* these normative notions to what individuals or communities *happen* to believe, whereas the objective pragmatist maintains a role for normative notions in a non-reductive sense. As she puts it:

> The divide between pragmatists is a hairline divide along the following lines. All pragmatist (and, more generally, naturalist) positions struggle with what I call the problem of validity. If normative notions such as truth and justice arise from human practices and cognition, as the pragmatist insists, then can we make sense of something's being really true or just? Or do truth and justice boil down to what this or that community or person believes? I argue […] that the pragmatist ought to come down of the side of the hairline divide that has our normative notions having some real force (Misak, 2013b: 436).

In the most general sense, it is the aim of this thesis to place James on the "realist" side of this hairline divide, alongside the Peircean.

I have mentioned that, as well as this realism, James is also committed to "pluralism" and a certain kind of "individualism". These terms will be elucidated in more detail in the thesis proper, but it is worth presenting a broad outline of them here. "Pluralism", as we shall see in Chapter III, is a complex term, and is used by James in a variety of contexts. In the most broad, negative sense, pluralism as James uses it is a rejection of monism: the idea that there is always *one* concept which completely captures a situation, *one* destined answer to every inquiry, or *one* right answer in any moral dilemma. Of course, in any actual case there may only be one reasonable answer to a given question. But James is mostly concerned with rejecting monism as the standard metaphysical, epistemological, or axiological presupposition. Pluralism in this sense is connected with what I have called "individualism". By "individualism" I simply mean James's insistence that individuals, the interactions between individuals, and the differences between various individuals' viewpoints, temperaments and sensitivies, have an important role to play in our philosophical projects.

Realism, individualism, and pluralism seem incompatible. Individualism clashes with realism because by allowing individuals *qua* individuals a substantive role in philosophical inquiry we appear to introduce the kinds of biases which prevent that inquiry from reaching a non-arbitrary conclusion. A philosopher *might* seek to make

individualism compatible with realism by postulating universal cognitive or affective features common to every individual, so that fundamental conflicts of perspective and opinion could not arise. But this is precisely what pluralism denies.

James provides a challenge to his interpreters precisely because he tries to hold a balance between these three seemingly incompatible features. James's individualism, pluralism, and realism can be found throughout his philosophy, from his metaphysics to his ethics. However, depending on his aim or context, often one feature takes precedence. Considering his career long battle against monism in both its idealistic (Absolute idealism) and materialistic (reductive naturalism) forms, more often than not it is James's individualism and pluralism which takes the foreground. And, worse, James was often careless in expressing these features in such a way that would make it clear how they were consistent with his realism. Taken apart from his statements about realism, James's individualism and pluralism appear to lead to a subjectivism in which truth and goodness become relative to individual opinion. This is precisely what Peircean realism *rejects*. This threat of pernicious subjectivism is the most pressing criticism which James faces.[5] As Suckiel puts it:

> to posit human purpose and desire as the ultimate determinants in such issues as reality, truth, and moral value seems to leave little room for an objective point of view […] if there is any single most challenging criticism of James's philosophy, it is that his positions are subjectivistic to an unacceptable degree (Suckiel, 1982: 12).

For this reason, it is worth keeping in mind that "the isolated reference from James is always unreliable".[6] Nonetheless, even careful readers of James can find sufficient reason for interpreting his position as subjectivistic. Even those who recognise all three features of James's philosophy, and his aim to balance them, often think that the tension between these features is simply impossible to overcome.[7] Contrary to such an interpretation, it is the aim of this thesis to show how James unifies these apparently incompatible features. On this account, it was James's aim to provide a theory of pragmatist inquiry into metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, which gave substantially

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[5] According to Bertrand Russell, for instance, James's philosophy of truth and religion was a kind of "subjectivistic madness", and most Anglo-American philosophy since has followed his interpretation (B. Russell, 1946: 775).

[6] Bixler, 1926: xi; quoted in McDermott, 1982: xi.

[7] Gale (1999) calls this the "making-discovering aporia", and suggests that the tension between James's desire for scientific objectivity and the importance he places on the creative power of the individual is *the* central problem of James's philosophy (Gale 1999: 31; 234-239). We will return to this in Chapter VII.

more weight than Peirce to the individual's role within inquiry, rejected monism, and at the same time maintained the realist elements which Peirce emphasised.[8]

It is worth noting one complication with interpreting James in this way before we begin. Many of the terms which James uses are either deliberately *ambiguous* between a subjective and objective usage, or have a subjective *and* an objective use. James's lack of clarity when using these terms can lead the reader to assume that the subjective interpretation of these terms is his sole use. James's term "experience" is a good example of the first type of ambiguity. By "experience" James is often interpreted as meaning the subjective experience of some individual. For this reason, James's assertions in both his ethics and metaphysics that we cannot appeal to anything other than experience when providing an account of normativity or reality seems to commit him to subjectivism. In actual fact, James deliberately chooses the word "experience" because it is ambiguous between subjective and objective interpretations. Experience always has a subjective side and an objective side.

James's use of the word "truth" is a good example of the second kind of ambiguity. James gives us a definition of truth (which we might call "pragmatic truth") as that which works for us, or that which it is expedient for us to believe. Seeing as it is plausible that often it is expedient to believe falsehoods, then the concepts of truth and expediency seem to separate, and James's notion of truth seems absurdly subjectivist. However, James also uses truth in another sense, to mean "absolute" or objective truth, by which he means a belief which no subsequent experience would ever lead us to doubt. These usages are not completely removed from one another. If some belief works for me, in a given context, then it is (pragmatically) true (for me, and for now). If that belief would *always* work in that context, and perhaps in others, and if others would find that it worked for them also, then that belief would be absolutely true. No possible experience could challenge its validity.[9]

In this thesis, we'll see that the duality of James's terms will come into play frequently. The three most obvious cases are "reality", "good" and "obligation". Each of these words have a subjective meaning in James's usage: something being real (for us) is for it to be

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[8] Michael Slater is one contemporary scholar who also tries to read James in this way. According to Slater:

> James's attempt to combine a weak version of metaphysical realism with a commitment to humanism in one of the most important and neglected features of his pragmatic theory of truth, and is arguably one of the more innovative philosophical positions developed in the twentieth century (Slater, 2009: 215).

Slater's primary interest is the relation between James's ethics and his faith. On this, see VI.4.

[9] Of course, pragmatism is committed to the kind of fallibilism which prevents us from ever being *certain* that we have ever attained this kind of absolute truth (see I.3).

interesting and demand our attention; something being good (for us) means that it corresponds to the satisfaction of something we demand, and something being obligatory (for us) means that we feel a pull towards it which cannot be ignored. However, throughout the thesis I shall argue that a close reading of James's whole oeuvre, and some elaboration, can open up objective usages of each of these terms as well.

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Let me now turn to a breakdown of the aims of each chapter. The thesis is organised into two parts, with the first part containing four chapters and the second part containing three. The first part, entitled "Metaphysics", deals with James's position on realism, individualism, and pluralism, as well as presenting and defending his system of metaphysics. The second part, "Ethics", applies his more general and metaphysical philosophy to his ethics.

Chapter I focuses on "realism" in pragmatism. In it, I aim to reject the claim that Jamesian and Peircean pragmatisms represent two incompatible interpretations of pragmatism, which are primarily divided on the grounds of realism. To do so I examine Peirce's own attempt to separate his pragmatism from others', and present the six criteria by which he does so. I then proceed to argue that James meets each of Peirce's six criteria, leaving us with good reason to think that Peircean and Jamesian pragmatisms are more unified than is commonly thought, and that James meets Peirce's own criteria for realism.

Chapter II focuses on "individualism". After unifying James and Peirce in terms of realism, this chapter explores a more interesting disagreement between the two pragmatists, regarding the role that individuals can play in ethical inquiry. I'll argue that though contemporary Peirceans present a view in which the experience of individuals, and their interactions, can provide important material for ethical inquiry, Peirce himself actively rejected this position. As such, I present the contemporary Peircean ethicist with a dilemma: either accept Peirce's anti-pragmatist stance on ethics, or reject the vast body of Peirce's work on ethics, and so render mysterious why the resulting position is "Peircean" at all. As James presents an account of ethics in which the individual is given an important role, the development of his position can solve the problems I identify in the Peircean position.

Chapter III focuses on "pluralism". In it, I examine recent arguments by Talisse and Aikin (2005; 2015) that pragmatism is inconsistent with pluralism on several levels. There, I delineate the various different claims that they make about this incompatibility in their two articles, and explore James's pluralism on several levels. Subsequently, I

argue against each of Talisse and Aikin's claims of incompatibility to reach the conclusion that James can consistently be a pluralist and a pragmatist.

Moving to more detailed exploration of James's position, Chapter IV articulates and defends an interpretation of his metaphysical position, "radical empiricism". In particular, I focus on defending this position from two critical claims: that it cannot provide a consistent account of how an idea refers its object; and that it cannot provide a distinction between objective reality and subjective experience. Later chapters draw from this interpretation of radical empiricism, and offer similar defences to similar criticisms in the ethical sphere.

Chapter V marks the move to the second part of the thesis. It presents James's account of value (or "demands" and "ideals") and obligation, through focusing not only on his ethical texts but also on his psychological account of attention, and his phenomenological account of significance. I suggest that we should read James as seeing our claims about value as hypothetical statements concerning the significance that some object of experience demonstrates when correctly attended to. Correspondingly, we have obligations to correctly attend to the objects which others claim to be significant.

Chapter VI presents an account of James's realism and commitment to objectivity in ethics by exploring his repeated assertions that every individual should consider themselves participants in an ongoing moral inquiry. I argue that this notion of moral inquiry can only be seen as objective if we have some notion of our hypothetical claims about value being responsive to something outside of subjective opinion, and only if we have some notion of the kind of procedure which can lead us towards truth in moral inquiry. I draw from James's radical empiricism to present an account of objective reference, and I argue that in the place of a procedural account of a good inquiry, James offers us a virtue ethical account of good inquirers.

The final chapter, Chapter VII, tries to resolve the apparent tension between James's realism and his individualism in ethics. I explore James's regular statements that we must see ourselves as in some sense contributing to or creating the moral universe. I argue that we can, in fact, incorporate these statements about individuals' role in the creation of the moral universe into an objective account of moral inquiry. Though it is a matter of discovery what values are truly significant, and in what ways they can realised, James's pluralism leads us to see that there are multiple incompossible values, and that we have individual choice concerning which of these are *actually* realised.

My thesis concludes that James can be seen as providing an objective and realist account of ethics, whilst maintaining a commitment to pluralism *and* the role of individuals regarding the formation of the moral universe. In maintaining his commitment to these three features, James not only provides an interesting alternative to contemporary approaches to pragmatist ethics, but a novel approach to ethics in general.

PART I:

JAMESIAN METAPHYSICS

The room was suddenly rich and the great bay-window was
Spawning snow and pink roses against it
Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:
World is suddener than we fancy it.

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.

And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world
Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes –
On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one's hands –
There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses.

Louis MacNeice, *Snow* (1935)
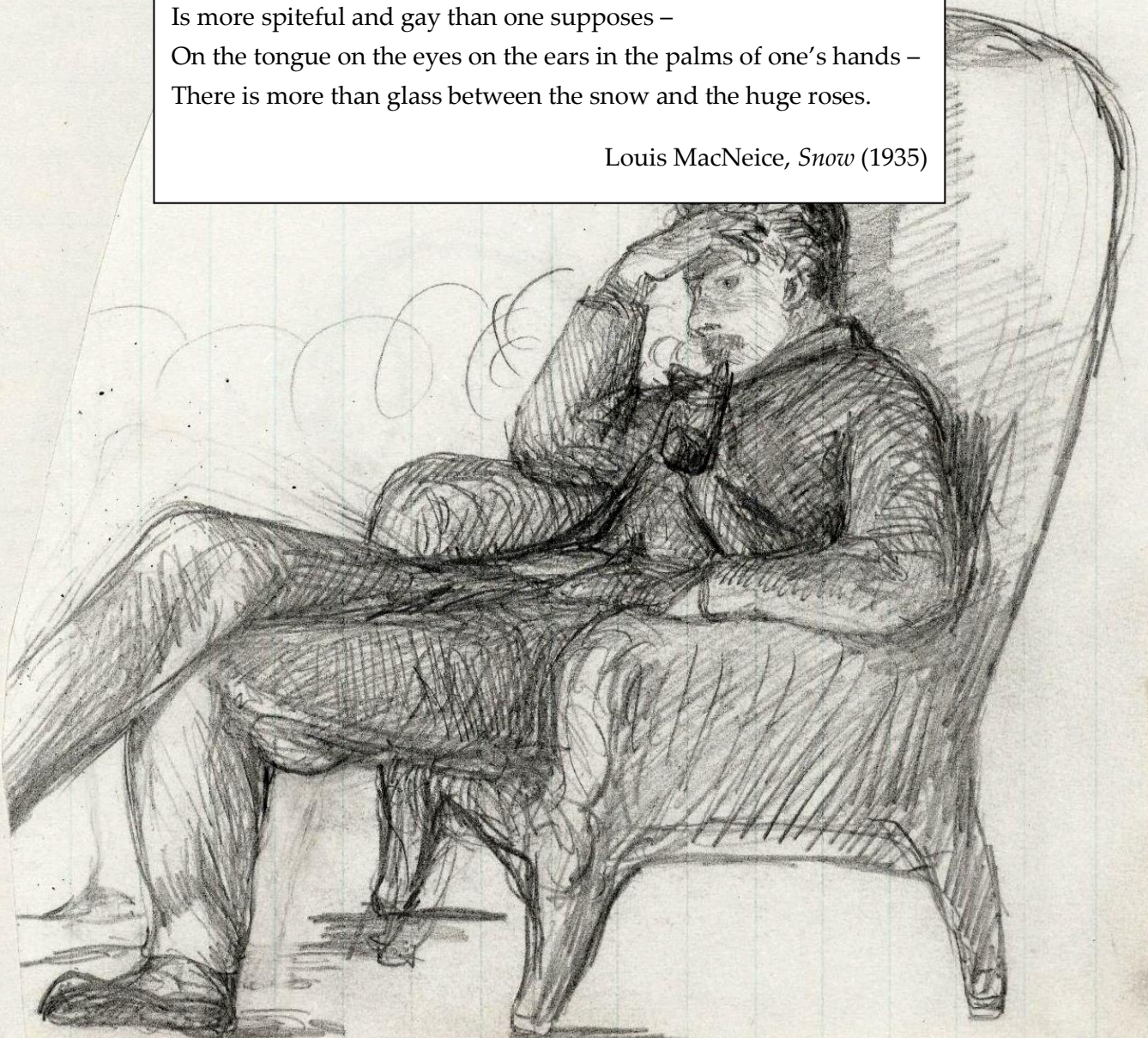
CHAPTER I:

THE PRAGMAT(IC)ISM OF WILLIAM JAMES

§1. INTRODUCTION

Since the creation of pragmatism, a great deal of ink has been spilt attempting to determine who is or is not a "real" pragmatist, and what exactly that might mean. These distinctions are often made for political, rather than philosophical, reasons.[1] There are always particular issues or discourses prevalent in academia which give us a reason for connecting one thinker to a version of pragmatism, and excluding another. In recent scholarship, the division most commonly drawn is between the respective pragmatisms of Peirce and James. Peirce is seen as providing an account of pragmatism which is logically grounded, scientific in approach, and which offers an objective account of truth. As such, his pragmatism coheres with particular attitudes and projects in Anglo-American philosophy. James's pragmatism, on the other hand, is presented as the kind which was rightly rejected by the founding analytic philosophers. It is woolly, nominalistic, and deeply subjectivistic.[2] Whether intentionally or not, the argument goes,

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[1] As Douglas Anderson points out (2005: 468).

[2] Of course, many analytic philosophers have been openly committed to subjectivism. But the tradition in analytic philosophy that contemporary (Peircean) pragmatists wish to connect with

this version of pragmatism opens a door which leads to relativism and "vulgar Rortyism".[3]

It is not only contemporary scholars who make this division, however. The first person to separate Jamesian and Peircean pragmatisms was in fact Peirce himself. In his 1905 *Monist* article, entitled "What Pragmatism Is", Peirce distinguishes between "pragmatism", a broad church which includes himself, James, Dewey, Schiller, as well as many historical figures, and "pragmaticism", which was a more narrow and defined version of pragmatism to which he subscribed. Though surprisingly coy in the published article about who precisely he was trying to distance himself *from* (he was, after all, still to some extent reliant on James's fame and good will), elsewhere it is clear that his target was James and those who followed him. Peirce held that James applied the doctrine of pragmatism too liberally, and that his "remodelling" of pragmatism had prominent parts which he held to be "opposed to sound logic" (1908, CP6.482; see 1903, CP5.358n.1). It was this which drove him to "kiss goodbye" to his "child" pragmatism, and give birth to "pragmaticism", a name which he held to be "ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers" (1905, CP5.414).[4]

Despite this ugliness, it is precisely the aim of this chapter to kidnap this term "pragmaticism", and argue that it should be applied to James as well as to Peirce. The next section will move through the various criteria by which Peirce separates his own "pragmaticism" from pragmatism more broadly, focusing on his two *Monist* articles, both published in 1905, "What Pragmatism Is" and "Issues of Pragmaticism" (§2). The subsequent sections will show that James meets these various criteria, moving from what

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is objectivistic. See Misak (2016) for more about the connection between classical pragmatism and analytic philosophy.

[3] Haack (1997). For examples of the division between these two types of pragmatism in recent scholarship, see in particular Misak (2013; 2015), and also Talisse (2010; 2013); Talisse and Aikin (2005); Haack (1977; 1997) and Mounce (1997) for a book length account of the split. Rorty makes the same split in the opposite direction, endorsing Jamesian pragmatism and arguing that Peirce did little more than give pragmatism its name (1982: 161). Klein (2013) and Levine (2013) are two contemporary figures arguing against this asserted divide from a Jamesian position.

[4] Though Peirce instigated this division between his own pragmat(ic)ism and James's, it may be that James adhered to it. Subsequent to Peirce's 1905 article, James's references to his pragmatist contemporaries do not include Peirce (though he still refers to Peirce as the creator of the term). In his Pragmatism lectures, for instance, he includes Dewey and Schiller as fellow pragmatists, but not Peirce (1907, P: 43), and he does the same in an interview that same year (1907, MEN: 229). The only time he would refer to Peirce as an ally again was in his *A Pluralistic Universe*, where he connects Peirce, Bergson, and himself as all holding the same view of synechism and tychism (1909, PU: 153). However, in correspondence Peirce denied this connection too, primarily because he disagreed with both James and Bergson's lack of rigour in expressing their position, with James's refusal to express himself more mathematically, and with what he saw as James's attribution of indeterminacy to the world of possibility as well as the world of existence (cf. 1909 letters presented in Perry, 1935, 2: 437-40). See Dea (2015) and Haack (1977) for more on the metaphysical distinctions between James and Peirce.

Peirce calls the "preliminary propositions" (§3), through James's position on metaphysical inquiry (§4), his stance on critical common-sensism (§5), and finally his realism about generals (§6).

I shall spend the most time on this last section, not just because realism is supposed to be *the* central issue between the two thinkers, but because showing that James can be a realist in Peirce's required sense here will be important to the thesis as a whole. If James is to be an ethical realist, he must be a realist about general truths, laws, or features of reality which are not reducible to mechanistic or nominalistic descriptions. As well as this, an understanding of James's pragmatism more generally, and its connection to empiricism and to common-sense philosophy, will serve us well going forward.

§2. PRAGMATISM AND PRAGMATICISM

At the beginning of the first *Monist* article, Peirce gives us the terminological rule by which he separates "pragmatism" from "pragmaticism":

> the name of a doctrine would naturally end in *-ism*, while *-icism* might mark a more strictly defined acception of that doctrine (1905, CP5.413).

Pragmaticism, then, is meant to be a more *defined* version of pragmatism. In a letter to the Italian pragmatist Mario Calderoni, Peirce presents the position he adopted in this article in the following way:

> In the April number of the *Monist* I proposed that the word "pragmatism" should hereafter be used somewhat loosely to signify affiliation with Schiller, James, Dewey, Royce, and the rest of us, while the particular doctrine which I invented the word to denote, which is your first kind of pragmatism, should be called "*pragmaticism.*" The extra syllable will indicate the narrower meaning (1905, CP8.205).

Peirce considers his "original" conception of what he now calls pragmaticism to have a number of advantages over the pragmatisms which followed it, and sees it as immune to a number of the problems which less precise pragmatisms entail (1905, CP5.415).[5]

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[5] Though Peirce admits to Calderoni that his original *expression* of pragmatism "went too far in the direction of nominalism", he asserts that the pragmatism he was *aiming* to express involved "a complete rupture with nominalism" (1905, CP8.208). Peirce thinks that the "capital merit" of his pragmaticism over other pragmatisms is that it "more readily connects itself with a critical proof of its truth" (1905, CP5.415). See Hookway (2012: 197-234) for an examination of Peirce's attempts to "prove" pragmaticism.

Pragmaticism, then, is the original, best, and most strictly defined version of pragmatism.

Seeing as pragmaticism is a more refined example of the species pragmatism, we need to be clear on what Peirce means by "pragmatism". Pragmatism, according to Peirce, emerges out of the application of a certain kind of scientific methodology to philosophy. When someone with an "experimentalist" perspective is asked to assess the meaning of any assertion, they tend to do so in terms of the kinds of experiences we should expect if certain actions are performed (1905, CP5.411). It was this experimentalist perspective which lead Peirce to express the pragmatic maxim, which in 1905 he defines in the following way:

> if one can define accurately all the conceivable experimental phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept could imply, one will have therein a complete definition of the concept, and there is absolutely nothing more in it (1905, CP5.412).[6]

A "pragmatist" in Peirce's terms is simply someone who holds some version of the pragmatic maxim. He is happy to attribute this definition to himself, James, Dewey, Schiller, Royce, and others (1905, CP5.414; 1905, CP8.205).

Before giving an account of "pragmaticism" and its differences from pragmatism, Peirce is keen to assert that there are several "preliminary propositions" which we must adopt if our pragmaticism is going to be anything more than "a nullity". He thinks that some of the other pragmatists (he mentions Schiller) include some of these propositions within their pragmatism, but Peirce aims here to present them precisely (1905, CP5.416). These propositions include a commitment to anti-foundationalism, anti-scepticism, and a theory of beliefs as habits of action. Let us take these in turn.

Peirce consistently and explicitly rejects any philosophical methodologies which attempt to find some certain foundation for philosophical reflections, either through the "first impressions of sense", or by "doubting everything" until we find something indubitable. The first strategy forgets that all our perceptions "are the results of cognitive elaboration". The second misunderstands what "doubt" really is (1905, CP5.416).

True doubt, Peirce tells us elsewhere, is an unpleasant state of mind which is characterised by a feeling of unease and by an inability to continue with some actual conduct. It is defined by the interruption of some actual belief, and initiates an inquiry to regain a stable belief (1877, W4: 247-8; 1905, CP5.510). Peirce often contrasts true doubt

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[6] Peirce's original expression of the pragmatic maxim was in "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" (1878, W3: 266). Other, distinct expressions of the pragmatic maxim can be found throughout Peirce's work (cf. 1903, CP5.18; 1905, CP5.9; 1905, CP5.438). See Hookway (2012: 165-181) for an exploration of these different formulations.

with what he calls "paper-doubt" (e.g. 1906, CP6.498). These are doubts merely entertained in philosophical reflection, in an attempt to find some one indubitable proposition, "as if doubting were 'as easy as lying'". But doubting is not easy. We cannot *really* doubt anything which we actually live by, and that which we do not actually doubt, we must "regard as infallible, absolute truth" (1905, CP5.416). Combined with his anti-foundationalism, then, Peirce presents a kind of anti-scepticism.

Rather than looking for some indubitable foundation from which to start our philosophical inquiry, Peirce holds that:

> there is but one state of mind from which you can "set out", namely the very state of mind in which you actually find yourself at the time you do "set out" – a state in which you are laden with an immense mass of cognition already formed, of which you cannot divest yourself if you would (1905, CP5.416).

Asserting that beliefs which we do not actually doubt are held to be absolutely true does not commit Peirce to anti-fallibilism. Peirce's assertion is that we must *hold* them to be absolutely true *until* we find an experience which actually leads us to *really* doubt them. Real doubt is "only called into being by a certain finite stimulus" (1905, CP5.416).[7] Any belief is theoretically open to doubt, but we should not doubt our beliefs until we have good reason to. Elsewhere, Peirce likens his view of inquiry to walking on a bog, rather than walking on a bedrock of certain fact. The best we can say is "this ground seems to hold for the present. Here I will stay until it begins to give way" (1898, CP5.589).[8]

This talk of real doubt leads us to our next preliminary proposition: that belief is a habit of action. A belief is not a "momentary mode of consciousness" but is a "habit of mind essentially enduring for some time". It is a disposition to a certain kind of conduct, in certain contexts. Doubt, on the other hand, is a "condition of erratic activity". One of the things which we are incapable of doubting is that we can influence our own habits. We can only consider ourselves and others responsible for conduct that is capable of being altered. Through preparation in imagination, and reflection after our actions, we alter our habits of conduct. The ideal end point of such a process is conduct which is marked by "an entire absence of self-reproach" (1905, CP5.417-8). So, Peirce's full position is that belief is a habit of action which is subject to self-control.

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[7] As Peirce puts it: "what you cannot in the least help believing is not, justly speaking, wrong belief. In other words, for you it is the absolute truth. True, it is conceivable that what you cannot help believing today, you might find you thoroughly disbelieve tomorrow" (1905, CP5.419).

[8] According to Putnam, the combination of fallibilism with anti-scepticism is one of pragmatism's most defining characteristics (1994: 152). See Putnam and Putnam, 1990: 221.

These are the preliminary propositions which any pragmaticism has to adopt.[9] Peirce now goes on to describe pragmaticism itself. The first assertion he makes is that pragmaticism is a type of "prope-positivism" (1905, CP5.423).[10] This essentially means that pragmaticism is committed to the application of scientific methodology to the problems of philosophy. Peirce expressed such a position first in "The Fixation of Belief", in which he argued that the method of science was superior to the method of *a priori* reasoning (1877, W3:242-57). It is through experiment and experience that we determine what is true, in any area of inquiry, and philosophy is no different. The application of the pragmatic maxim to philosophical problems allows us to determine which avenues of inquiry can reach experimentally testable conclusions, and which are "meaningless gibberish". Subsequently, "what will remain of philosophy will be a series of problems capable of investigation by the observational methods of the true sciences" (1905, CP5.423).

Calling pragmaticism a prope-positivism does not commit Peirce to any kind of materialism, naturalism, or claims about the reducibility of metaphysical propositions to propositions of a particular natural science. This is purely a position about the kind of methodology we should see as operative in our philosophical inquiries. Pragmaticism is distinguished from other positivisms, according to Peirce, by its holding three other doctrines:

> [W]hat distinguishes it from other species [of positivism] is, first, its retention of a purified philosophy; secondly, its full acceptance of the main body of our instinctive beliefs; and thirdly, its strenuous insistence upon the truth of scholastic realism (1905, CP5.423).

It is these three criteria which are doing the work in distinguishing pragmaticism, not just from other positivisms, but also from other kinds of pragmatism.

The first criterion concerns Peirce's assertion that pragmaticism does not reject all metaphysics, but "extracts from it a precious essence, which will serve to give light and life to cosmology and physics" (CP5.423). Peirce wants "pure" philosophy, such as logic, metaphysics, and ethics, to still be pursuable under pragmaticism, just pursued according to the scientific method. The second criterion concerns what Peirce calls, in his second 1905 *Monist* paper, "critical common-sensism", and which he connects with

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[9] Peirce also seems to imply that belief in a limited form of synechism is required, in two senses. He asserts that a person is not absolutely an individual, and that a community can be thought of along an analogy to an organism. Peirce asserts that these two features are necessary for being able to distinguish between "absolute truth" and "what you do not doubt", but he does not elaborate on how (1905, CP5.421). However, synechism is meant to be among the things which pragmaticism goes on to prove (1905, CP5.415). So, on pain of circularity, it seems that Peirce cannot hold it as a "preliminary proposition" as well.

[10] Peirce had previously defined the prefix "prope" as marking a "broad and rather indefinite extension of the meaning of the term to which it was prefixed" (1905, CP5.413).

Scottish common-sense philosophy (1905, CP7.438-463). Elsewhere Peirce expresses this view by saying that pragmaticism "implies faith in common sense and in instinct, though only as they issue from the cupel-furnace of measured criticism" (1908, CP5.480). The third criterion asserts the validity of scholastic realism. In Peircean terms, this means realism about "Thirdness". The pragmaticist must be a realist about generals, laws, continuity, possibility, and relation (1903, CP5.93ff).[11]

This is not the place to rehearse Peirce's arguments for, and defences of, these various positions. The aim of this chapter is to determine whether on these criteria Peirce could legitimately separate his own pragmatism from that of James. According to his published papers of 1905, Peirce has given us six criteria by which we can recognise a pragmaticist: 1), they must hold some version of the pragmatist maxim; 2) they must be committed to the "preliminary propositions" of anti-foundationalism, anti-scepticism, and seeing belief as a habit of action susceptible to self-control; 3) they must be a prope-positivist, in the sense of being committed to scientific methodology in philosophical investigations; 4) they must be committed to the possibility of metaphysical inquiry; 5) they must be a critical common-sensist, and; 6) they must be a realist about generals. The rest of the chapter will aim to show that James does in fact meet these criteria.

§3. JAMES AND THE PRELIMINARY PROPOSITIONS (CRITERIA 1-3).

It is entirely uncontentious that James held, and made popular, a version of the pragmatic maxim. He presented this first in 1898 with his "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results" (P: 257ff), and sometimes calls it "the principle of Peirce" (1907, P: 29-30). He quotes Peirce's early formulation often, and utilises the pragmatic maxim as a way of understanding what is at stake in various philosophical problems. It is also fairly uncontentious that James saw himself as applying a scientific methodology to these problems. He continually connects pragmatism with empiricism in this regard, and asserts that moral, religious, and metaphysical inquiries be performed in a way quite analogous to science (e.g. 1891, WB: 157; 1897, WB: 8-9).[12]

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[11] See Peirce, 1903, CP5.93ff; c.1888, W6.172ff.

[12] As James puts it forcibly in *Some Problems*:

> The sciences [...] using hypotheses only, but always seeking to verify them by experiment or observation, open a way for indefinite self-correction and increase. [...] Philosophy must, in any case, complete the sciences, and must incorporate their methods. One cannot see why, if such a policy should appear advisable, philosophy might not end by forswearing all dogmatism whatever, and become

Peirce agrees. In an unpublished note, he outlines two propositions which he sees every pragmatist, James included, as being committed to. The first is that pragmatism is "merely a method of ascertaining the meanings of hard words and abstract concepts". The second is that the method of doing so is the "experimental method" (c.1906, CP5.464-5). This agreement leads both James and Peirce to assert that the meaning of any proposition is located in the future. We find the meaning of a given proposition by tracing what experiences would follow from its being true, and seeing if experience confirms this (Peirce, 1905, CP5.427; James, 1907, P: 45ff). Both connect this to what Peirce calls a "logical rule", and what James calls an "empiricist criterion", that "[b]y their fruits ye shall know them" (James, 1902, VRE:25; Peirce, c.1906, CP5.465).[13]

James consistently holds a kind of anti-scepticism, though somewhat different than Peirce's. Peirce distinguishes between real and paper doubts in a way that makes the legitimate adoption of genuine scepticism hard to imagine. James on the other hand tends to accede that it *is* possible to be a genuine sceptic, but that such a position is practically undesirable. We cannot prove by logic that the sceptic is incorrect. We can only assert that *we* cannot be sceptics if we wish to continue with our practices of philosophy, morality, and finding our lives meaningful. Hopefully, the success of those practices will legitimise our assumption (1891, WB: 141; 1896, WB: 20; 28; 1909, MT: 107-8). James's anti-scepticism, then, tends to take the form of a kind of regulative hope, whereas Peirce offers us an argument concerning the nature of doubt.[14]

The empirical methodology of philosophy is explicitly connected by James with anti-foundationalism and fallibilism. Once scepticism is rejected, we have the choice of absolutism and empiricism. Absolutism asserts that there are certain and self-certifying beliefs. Empiricism, on the other hand, holds that we cannot ever with certainty know

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as hypothetical in her manners as the most empirical science of them all (1910, SPP: 19).

Going ahead, we will see this scientific methodology at work in James's ethical theory.

[13] Though both connect pragmatism with this consequentialist account of meaning, Hookway points to a subtle difference between the two accounts. Whereas Peirce maintains that the relevant future consequences must of necessity be laws and habits, James allows that the meaning of a concept can also be "cashed out" in "particular actions and perceptions" (Hookway, 1997b: 152).

[14] Like Peirce, James holds that the opposite of belief is "*doubt and inquiry, not disbelief*", and James sees doubt as "our mind [in] unrest", seeking a return to stable belief (1890, PP2: 914). Further, James does hold that there is a distinction between "real" doubt and mere sceptical philosophy. I cannot doubt the reality of whatever is in "*intimate and continuous connection with my life*" (1890, PP2: 926). But James does hold that certain experiences, metaphysical outlooks, or pathologies can lead us to an genuinely alienated position in which such connection is lost, and the world takes on a "feeling of unreality" (1902, VRE: 59), and it seems as if "everything is hollow, unreal, [and] dead" (1890, PP2: 915). This is what James means by genuine (as opposed to philosophical) scepticism. We shall discuss such cases, and their connection with individual freedom, more in the final chapter (VII.1).

which of our beliefs are absolutely true. James adopts the latter option, holding that there is only one absolutely certain item of knowledge, and that is that "the present phenomenon of consciousness exists". This gives us no concrete knowledge, but is simply the "mere admission of a stuff to be philosophized-about". Empiricism does not deny that truth can be obtained, or that "we gain an ever better position towards [truth] by systematically continuing to roll up experiences and think". But as beliefs cannot self-certify, we must admit that any one of them could be shown to be revisable in the long-run (1896, WB: 20-24).

James also sees an account of beliefs as habits of action as following from the adoption of the pragmatic maxim.[15] In his first explicit presentation of the maxim in 1898 he links it to habit in this way: "[b]eliefs […] are really rules for action; and the whole function of thinking is but one step in the production of habits of action" (1898, P:259). In the *Principles* James presents a view of habit in which it is the relative plasticity of organic beings which allows them to take on complex habits (1890, PP 1: 109ff). According to James, human beings have more capacity to adopt and change their habits than other creatures, and he adjures his readers to act in ways which cement positive dispositions (1890, PP 1: 126ff; 1892/1899, TT: 47ff). So James, with Peirce, holds that belief is a habit of action which is subject to self-control.[16]

This leads us to the perhaps unsurprising conclusion that James meets all of Peirce's "preliminary propositions", as well as holding a version of the pragmatic maxim, and advocating the application of a broad scientific method to problems of philosophy. These were the first three criteria Peirce used to identify a pragmaticist. The question remains whether James meets the final three criteria.[17]

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[15] In fact, it is likely that both Peirce and James inherited this view independently from the psychologist Alexander Bain. Peirce once said that pragmatism followed as a corollary from Bain's definition of belief as "that upon which a man is prepared to act", and gave Bain the honorific of "the grandfather of pragmatism" (Peirce, c. 1906, CP5.12). See Fisch (1954) for an examination of Bain's connection to classical pragmatism.

[16] This theory of habit will be an important aspect in Peirce's ethics (II.4), and in my own theory of James's ethical position (V.3; VI.3).

[17] Interestingly, Jackman (1999) defends a feature of James's will-to-believe doctrine on the grounds of these preliminary propositions:

> An anti-foundationalist streak associated with fallibilism itself provides a justification for our passional believing. These initial beliefs can be revised, but since we must start with something, we are entitled to start with the beliefs which are the product of our "intellectual climate" [i.e. our "passional" or "willing" natures] (Jackman, 1999: 19).

The will-to-believe thesis is one of the largest differences between James and Peirce. We shall return to it in the final chapter (VII.1).

§4. James and Metaphysics (Criterion 4)

In his review of James's *Principles of Psychology*, Peirce criticises James for bracketing metaphysical questions out of his psychology. James's move at the beginning of the *Principles* is to uncritically assume the propositions required for the science of psychology to proceed: that there are minds with thoughts and feelings, that there is a physical world, and that minds can know that world. All these assumptions can be called into question, but, according to James, "the discussion of them [...] is called metaphysics and falls outside the province of this book" (1890, PP 1: 6). James restricts his psychology to the investigation of what he takes to be the empirical phenomena of feelings, thoughts, brain states, and their relations. Explanations of these phenomena which appealed to entities such as "souls" or "transcendental egos" would be, again, metaphysical. So, James aims to separate psychology as a natural science from metaphysics.[18]

According to Peirce, this move by James is nothing but "prestigiation":

> To call a branch of an inquiry "metaphysical" is merely a mode of objurgation, which signifies nothing but the author's personal distaste for that part of his subject. It does not in the least prove that considerations of that sort can throw no light on the questions he has to consider (1890, CP8.60).[19]

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[18] James makes a similar claim in "A Plea for Psychology as a 'Natural Science'" (1892), where he claims that any natural science must take for granted certain metaphysical assumptions about the "physical world" and our "cognizance" of it, but that the responsibility for offering accounts of the meaning of these terms belonged to philosophy, rather than psychology (1892, EPs: 271). However, by 1895, James appears to have rethought his position. In his presidential address to the American Psychological Association, he makes the following startling reversal:

> I have become convinced since publishing [*The Principles*] that no conventional restrictions *can* keep metaphysical and so-called epistemological inquiries out of the psychology books (1895, EPh: 88).

It is unlikely that it was Peirce's criticisms which persuaded James on this point, but other practicing psychologists such as G. T. Ladd and G. S. Fullerton. See Klein (2015b: 157-161).
[19] Peirce is not clear in his review exactly what he is concerned will follow from preventing metaphysical inquiry a role within psychology. However, elsewhere he says this:

> [I]f psychology were restricted to phenomena of consciousness, the establishment of mental associations, the taking of habits, which is the very market-place of psychology, would be outside of its boulevards (c.1902, CP7.367)

Peirce's view is that a full account of what a habit is requires a metaphysical position on generality. Seeing that James has a great deal to say in his *Principles* about habit formation, we have to assume that he did not feel restricted in the ways that Peirce is worried about. But the

Peirce takes James as rejecting the possibility of usefully and scientifically inquiring into metaphysical propositions. However, it is not at all clear that James *is* denying that certain metaphysical considerations have a bearing on psychology, or that these considerations can be inquired into. Indeed, he suggests that his adopted assumptions, which appear to be metaphysical in nature, *can* be discussed in a separate metaphysical inquiry. This presumably means that such an inquiry could disprove, alter, or criticise these assumptions in a way that would effect empirical psychology. James just does not think that such an inquiry should be performed *within* empirical psychology. His aim appears to be the delineation of different avenues of inquiry, with the understanding that that they can influence each other when appropriate.[20]

In actual fact, James is quite clear from a very early point in his career that metaphysics is a necessary type of inquiry. For instance, in his 1879 version of "The Sentiment of Rationality", James says the following:

> Metaphysics of some sort there must be. The only alternative is between the good Metaphysics of clear-headed Philosophy, and the trashy Metaphysics of vulgar Positivism (1879, EPh: 56-57).

James makes at least two points about the necessity of pursuing metaphysical inquiry. The first concerns the idea that *any* account of the world will involve some metaphysics. Even apparently metaphysically innocent statements about "Nature" and "Law" involve taking an implicit ontological stance. We can either accept the unexamined

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broad threat remains: Peirce is actually concerned that bracketing metaphysical questions out of scientific investigation can lead us to block relevant paths of inquiry. See Girel (2003) for a full exploration of Peirce's criticisms of James's psychology, and why he thought that a full explanation of key psychological phenomena required a detailed logical and metaphysical framework.

[20] A second criticism Peirce offers of the *Principles* is that James adopts certain data "uncritically". According to Peirce

> [t]he principle of the uncritical acceptance of data, to which Prof. James clings, practically amounts to a claim to a new kind of liberty of thought, which would make a complete rupture with accepted methods of psychology and of space in general (1890, CP8.61).

Again, this seems like a somewhat unfair criticism. James is not advocating that any particular *data* is accepted uncritically. James is simply suggesting that for a particular scientific inquiry to proceed, it must adopt certain regulative or methodological assumptions uncritically. See Klein (2008) for a detailed account of how James's "uncritical" adoption of certain assumptions was a practical move in delineating a particular subject area, and making psychology a respectable science. In fact, we might think such a move is analogous to Peirce's own idea of regulative postulates or "hopes". These are broad propositions which we must hope to be true if we are to continue with a particular kind of practice (c.1887-8, W6: 206). See Klein (2015a: 87-105) for a detailed exploration of how James's notion of hypothesis formation compares to Peirce's notion of abduction and regulative assumptions. See §6.1.

materialist metaphysics of "vulgar positivism" without question, or we undertake some more philosophical investigation into metaphysics.

James's second point about metaphysics concerns the necessity of metaphysical inquiry for *practical* life. Each of us carries around some metaphysical formula, some picture of the way we think the universe is, "under [our] hat" (1879, EPh: 32). In most cases these metaphysical ideas are confused and unexamined. They tell us what we ought to expect from the world, what possibilities the universe allows for, and what meanings our actions can or cannot have within it. These metaphysical systems have real practical effects on our lives, and can lead to real practical and existential problems when they go wrong (e.g. 1896, WB: 39-40). It is in some sense the philosopher's task to make explicit, organise, and improve these various inchoate metaphysical positions.

James's primary use of the pragmatic maxim, in later years, was its application to metaphysical and other philosophical problems in an attempt to elucidate the pragmatic issues which were at stake. In some cases, this would lead to the discovery that there *were* no pragmatic or experiential effects, and so a dissolution of the problem. In other cases, the application of the maxim would discover the practical difference between the competing options so that they could be frankly evaluated and tested on their pragmatic effects (e.g. 1907, P: 45ff). In this regard, James seems to be following Peirce's suggestion that the application of the pragmatic maxim to philosophy would separate problems which can be solved through the experimental method, and those which were "meaningless gibberish" (1905, CP5.423).

Overall, James seems to be committed to the view that we should reject "vulgar positivism", and its distaste for metaphysics, and consider a scientifically conducted metaphysical inquiry a necessary part of philosophy.

§5. JAMES AND CRITICAL COMMON-SENSISM (CRITERION 5)

It is in his second *Monist* article on this topic, entitled "Issues of Pragmaticism", that Peirce clarifies exactly what he means by "Critical Common-Sensism". Critical common-sensism is a variety of Scottish common-sense philosophy, but differentiated by six different characteristics. I'll briefly run through these characteristics now.

Any common-sensism involves the assertion that there are foundational beliefs which are indubitable. The first characteristic of *critical* common-sensism is that there are *inferences* as well as beliefs which are indubitable (1905, CP5.440). Peirce suggests that

> there are, besides perceptual judgements, original (ie. indubitable
> because uncritized) beliefs of a general and recurrent kind, as well as
> indubitable acritical inferences (1905, CP5.442).

Peirce is concerned here to present a distinction between cases of inference in which we consciously reason from one belief to another belief on the basis of a general principle, and cases of inference in which we consciously move from one belief to another *without* appealing to a general principle. These latter inferences proceed acritically, in the sense we move from one belief no another without explicit reasoning, and are indubitable. Common-sense beliefs and inferences are indubitable not in the sense that they are *permanently* immune from doubt, but in the sense that we currently have no *real reason* to doubt them. These are the foundational beliefs and inferences which ground our practices.

The second characteristic of critical common-sensism is that indubitable beliefs and inferences evolve over generations as a result of human beings' interaction with their environment. This connects to the third characteristic: that these indubitable and slowly evolving ideas should be thought of as *instincts*, and should be considered indubitable only when applied to "affairs that resemble those of a primitive mode of life" similar to those in which the belief evolved. The further we get from the context that these beliefs first arose in, the less easily applicable they are (1905, CP5.444-445).

According to Peirce the "most distinctive" characteristic of the critical common-sensist is the fourth, that "the acritically indubitable is invariably vague" (1905, CP5.446). Peirce's notion of vagueness is complex, but here it will be sufficient to connect vagueness with indeterminacy of application or interpretation. In an unpublished paper on the same topic, Peirce tells us that

> [a] sign is objectively *vague*, insofar as, leaving its interpretation more or
> less indeterminate, it reserves for some other possible sign or experience
> the function of completing the determination (c. 1905, CP5.505).

It is with this in mind that we should interpret Peirce's claim that the principle of contradiction does not apply to vague propositions. A vague proposition is still open to being interpreted in a number of definite ways. Until we know which determinate form a vague proposition should take, "it may be true that a proposition is true and that a proposition is false" (1905, CP5.448).

Seeing as many of our common-sense concepts evolved in primitive man's interaction with an environment, the application of these concepts outside of this context shows them to be indeterminate. The vague belief that "fire burns" evolved in the context of our survival, and became an instinctual and indubitable one. Nonetheless, in contexts far removed from primitive man's, such as laboratory conditions, we might find materials which fire does not burn. Such cases do not disprove the original, vague

expression of this belief. If the cinema in which we are sitting begins to catch fire, we will still have an immediate and instinctual response. But it means that such a belief is indeterminate in certain contexts, in the sense that these contexts require the belief to be articulated more definitely.[21]

The fifth characteristic which distinguishes the critical common-sensist is the "great value he attaches to doubt". The critical common-sensist is not only happy to revise beliefs in the light of experience which makes them doubtful, but actually "invents a plan for attaining doubt, elaborates it in detail, and then puts it into practice". Only afterwards, if we find the proposition can still not be doubted, does the critical common-sensist pronounce the belief to be "indubitable". Even then, they acknowledge the possibility that some future experience might bring that belief into question (1905, CP5.451). This is simply the application of fallibilism and the scientific method to common-sensism. Finally, the sixth and most obvious characteristic of critical common-sensism is that it is critical: of itself, of regular common-sensism, of Kantianism, and of psychologism (1905, CP5.452).

Perhaps the simplest way to think about critical common-sensism is that it is the thesis that there are indubitable (in the sense of not available to real doubt) beliefs and inferences which are fallible (in the sense that they can be revised if we encounter the right kinds of experience) and vague (in the sense that they require more definite articulation in contexts further away from their original context), which form a basic foundation for many of our practices.

Does James hold a comparable account of common-sensism? His most sustained exploration of common-sense occurs in his *Pragmatism* lectures (1907). There he presents the view that every individual is an "extreme conservative" in the sense that everyone naturally wants to preserve their beliefs.[22] When we are compelled by experience to

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[21] As an example of this principle, Christopher Hookway points us to Peirce's assertion that some newly found humanoid skeleton can in a certain sense be considered both a man and not a man:

> To the question whether a certain newly found skeleton was the skeleton of a man rather than an anthropoid ape, the reply "Yes and No" might, in a certain sense, be justifiable. Namely, owing to our conception of what a man is having formed without thinking about the possibility of such a creature as that to which this skeleton belongs, the question really has no definite meaning (MS 596, quoted in Hookway 2000: 146).

Our concept of "man" evolved outside of its application to such cases, and as such it is indeterminate whether or not it applies in this case. Subsequent determination of our concept will make clear which way we should evaluate the skeleton. See Hookway (2000: 135-158) for a more detailed elaboration of the subject of vagueness in Peirce, and the usefulness of vague propositions. See also Nadin (1980).

[22] He attributes the same view to fellow pragmatists Dewey and Schiller (1907, P: 35).

adopt some new belief, we try to minimize the effect this new addition has on beliefs which we already hold. However, once a new belief has been adopted, it tends to alter those which it is inferentially related to. In this way, "[o]ur minds […] grow in spots; and like grease-spots, the spot's spread. However, in the same way the new beliefs we adopt are altered by older beliefs. Any novel experience we have is couched in the various assumptions and predictions of our old beliefs. To elucidate, James gives us a kind of "Neurath's boat" image, not dissimilar to Peirce's bog metaphor: "[w]e patch and tinker more than we renew. The novelty soaks in; it stains the ancient mass; but it is also tinged by what absorbs it" (1907, P: 83).

The "ancient mass" James is talking about here is our store of inherited beliefs, which James also terms common-sense. These are a class of beliefs which serve as the foundation of most of our everyday practices, and include in their number notions such as "a thing", space and time, minds and bodies, and the difference between reality and fantasy (1907, P: 85). Though critical philosophy might be able to question these foundational elements of our thought, we cannot really doubt them in our practical lives. James takes the notion of a "thing" as an example. We might postulate in philosophy that a thing is just a "group of sense-qualities united by a law". Or we might in physical science learn that a thing is a swirling mass of atoms. Nonetheless, when "critical pressure is relaxed", and we leave the classroom or laboratory, we return to our common-sense ideas of things. "Our later and more critical philosophies", James tells us, "are mere fads and fancies compared with this natural mother-tongue of thought". It is only "minds debauched by learning" which even suspect common-sense beliefs of not being "absolutely true" (1907, P: 88-89).

Despite their foundational role, these ideas are neither permanent nor absolute. Like Peirce, James holds them to be the result of generations of evolution.[23] All common-sense beliefs were once hypotheses, adopted by our primitive ancestors, applied to experience, and found to work so successfully that they became a fundamental part of our thought. As James puts it, "*our fundamental ways of thinking about things are discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves throughout experience of all subsequent time*" (1907, P: 83). The fundamentality of these beliefs makes them harder to question, and makes it less likely that we will encounter an experience which will make us doubt them. But we should not consider them infallible or self-evident, as the rationalistic scholastic philosophers did (1907, P: 90). No matter how old they are, we should still consider our common-sense beliefs to be "a collection of extraordinarily

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[23] It is unclear on James's account exactly in what sense these ideas "evolve". James might simply mean that ideas themselves evolve over time through experience (a kind of memetic evolution). Or James might hold that over time the evolution of these ideas are represented in alterations in our brain structure and instinctual habits (physiological evolution). Some combination of both views is most likely.

successful hypotheses", and so subject to revision in appropriate circumstances. At least in philosophical inquiry, then, we should maintain a healthy "suspicion" about common-sense ideas, rather than assuming their eternal veracity (1907, P: 94).

These common-sense beliefs are the foundation of most if not all of our everyday practices, and they are instrumental in the sense that they allow us to make inferences and predictions about future experience. However, the application of these common-sense beliefs outside of the contexts in which they emerged leads to them being less determinate, and the inferences we make using them less secure. For instance, our concepts of time and space work perfectly well when we apply them to our daily practical lives. But when we apply our common-sense ideas on a cosmic scale, they become "vague, confused, and mixed" (1907, P: 87). Accordingly, James tells us that "[t]he moment you pass beyond the practical use of these categories [...] to a merely curious or speculative way of thinking, you find it impossible to say within just what limits of fact any one of them shall apply" (1907, P: 90). This is essentially Peirce's point concerning the indeterminacy of common-sense beliefs when applied to different contexts.[24]

We have some reason, then, to think that James holds a common-sensism which is just as "critical" as Peirce's. Like Peirce, James holds that there are indubitable (in the sense of us having no real reason to doubt them) beliefs and inferences, which are fallible (in the sense that they can be revised if we encounter the right kinds of experience) and vague (in the sense that they require more definite articulation in contexts further away from their original context), and which form a basic foundation for many of our practices.[25]

The difference between Peirce and James on these matters concerns whether or not we should interpret critical common-sensism monistically or pluralistically. Whereas Peirce appears to hold that these indubitable foundational instincts are universal, at least within one particular culture, James allows room for the operation of individual temperamental differences. Whereas one person might have a foundational need to find the universe a moral place, another might be compelled to express a religious interpretation of the universe, and yet another a logically intelligible one. The idea that there are competing sentimental differences in different people, and the idea that a good philosophy in some sense needs to balance the needs of these different foundational

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[24] The application of our common-sense ideas to a "cosmic scale" is in part what we do when we do metaphysics, either as amateurs in our own lives, or as part of an ongoing philosophical inquiry. The resulting vagueness and confusion does not suggest that we cannot reach conclusions in our metaphysical inquiries, but it does tell us how difficult it is, and how prone to error we might be in such a field.

[25] We shall see that many ethical concepts are, for James, common-sense in precisely this sense (VI.3.2).

temperaments, is an idea which runs through James's philosophy (1882, WB: 57ff; 1907, P: 9ff; 1909, PU: 55; see VI.1). We can think of this as the difference between Peirce's monistic critical common-sensism, and James's pluralistic version of the same thesis.

§6. JAMES AND SCHOLASTIC REALISM (CRITERION 6)

Of the criteria which defined pragmaticism, scholastic realism was the most important to Peirce. He called himself a realist of an "extreme stripe" (c. 1906, CP5.470), and suggested that "pragmaticism could hardly have entered a head that was not already convinced that there are real generals" (1905, CP5.503). It is also the most important criterion for our current inquiry. It is James's supposed nominalism which is most often alluded to when drawing a distinction between his and Peirce's pragmatisms.

Scholastic realism is deeply connected with Peirce's category of "thirdness". Being a realist about thirdness means being committed to realism about generals, laws, relations, possibility, and continuity. Rejecting realism about thirdness is what Peirce means by nominalism. Nominalism, according to Peirce, is a flawed doctrine, which has serious negative implications for both theoretical inquiry and practical life. Despite this, he saw it as being almost universally held among contemporary and historical thinkers.[26] In a letter to James in 1904, Peirce described refuting nominalism as by far pragmatism's "most important consequence" (1904, CP8.258).

Peirce has a consistent definition of what it means for something to be "real". The real is "that whose characters are independent of what anybody may think them to be", and is the object which is represented by that "opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate" (1878, W3: 271-273). The difference between the scholastic realist and the nominalist, then, concerns whether or not laws, generals, and relations have this kind of reality. The realist will hold that they do, whereas the nominalist will hold that they are "constituted simply by […] the way in which our minds are affected by the individual objects which have in themselves no resemblance or relationship whatsoever". Note that the scholastic realist need not hold that generals are independent of *all* thought, but only that they are independent of "how you, or I, or any number of

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[26] Kant, Locke, Hume, Reid, Mill, Hegel, Leibniz, Plato and Aristotle are only some of the figures Peirce sees as nominalists (cf. Peirce 1898, CP4,33; 1903, CP1.19; c.1906, CP5.470). Even Duns Scotus, the central figure of the medieval realists, is sometimes accused of nominalism (c. 1905, CP1.560; c.1905, CP8.208). See Forster (2011: 1n2) for a full list of the figures Peirce took to be nominalists.

men think" and so are independent of "all that is arbitrary and individual in thought" (1871, W2: 467-9).[27]

In this final section I aim to show that James is a realist about generals in this sense, and so meets Peirce's final criterion for being recognised as a pragmaticist. I shall do so by arguing that James is *not* a nominalist in three separate areas: he is not an ontological nominalist (§6.1); he does not have a nominalist view of perception (§6.2); and he is not an epistemological nominalist (§6.3).

§6.1 ONTOLOGICAL NOMINALISM

The central ontological thesis of nominalism is that reality at bottom is *solely* made up of discrete individuals, and that laws, generals, and relations are not real. As Peirce puts it, nominalists "recognise but one mode of being, the being of an individual thing or fact" (1903, CP1.21).

James certainly takes individuals to be of central importance in his philosophy, and this is often taken to be evidence of his nominalism. At least part of the reason James prioritised individuals in this way was his antagonism towards a specific version of Absolute idealism. James argued (particularly in *A Pluralistic Universe*) that the monistic idealisms which exclusively privileged the general and the universal in their accounts of reality produced not only intellectual but also existential problems.[28] However, denying the *priority* of generals is not the same as denying their *reality*.[29]

In fact, when criticising traditional empiricisms and idealisms in his metaphysical work, James suggests that they have a common problem at root. And that problem looks a lot like nominalism. Both start from the assumption that reality is fundamentally *dis-*

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[27] Should there be general logical truths, for instance, then they would be independent of any one person's or group's thinking, and so independent of all that is arbitrary in thought. But, as laws *of thought*, they would not be independent of *all* thought. See Peirce 1909, CP6.453 for a later expression of the same view.

[28] Though this is most clearly expressed in *A Pluralistic Universe*, we can find James's concerns about monistic idealism throughout his entire career. See Stern and Williams (forthcoming). Also see VII.1.

[29] Peirce was certainly an "extreme" realist, in that he held that the general was "the most important element of being" (1898, CP4.1). Peirce's realism was so extreme, he rejected the individual as having any role in philosophical inquiry, seeing them only as a source of error, and even denying their existence (1868, W2: 242). We shall return to this extremity in the next chapter (II). However, he does not, in his 1905 *Monist* articles (or elsewhere to my knowledge), claim that this extremism is required by the pragmaticist, only that realism is.

unified.[30] Once we start from an assumption of atomism, the patterns and the unities which we experience become mysterious. Empiricism attempts to solve this problem by appealing to conventional habits of association, and idealism by introducing trans-experiential agencies to bind the disparate elements of our experience together (e.g. "The Absolute"). Rather than starting from a false assumption of atomism, however, James points to the fact that our normal experience contains both continuities and discontinuities. We have no more reason, he argues, for assuming that one requires explanation any more than the other. If idealists and empiricists were consistent, they would feel compelled to produce philosophical explanations for the disunity as well as the unity found in our experience. James's strategy, on the other hand, is to assume that continuity and discontinuity are on an equal ontological footing:

> [I]f we insist on treating things as really separate when they are given as continuously joined, invoking, when union is required, transcendental principles to overcome the separateness we have assumed, then we ought to stand ready to perform the converse act. We ought to invoke higher principles of *dis*union, also, to make our merely experiential disjunctions more truly real. Failing this, we ought to let the originally given continuities stand on their own bottom (1904, ERE: 26-27).

Without naming it, James is criticising classical empiricism and certain forms of idealism for assuming a *nominalistic* world picture.

The main methodological postulate of James's "radical empiricism" is that we should treat everything which is experienceable as real, and vice-versa (1904, ERE: 22). James's assertion that we should take continuity to be just as real as discontinuity should be understood in this full metaphysical sense. Of course, any actual instance of experienced continuity might be shown to be false on subsequent examination. But there is no reason for rejecting the reality of all continuity.[31]

Most often when James talks about continuity in his radical empiricism papers, he refers to *relations* which obtain between features of experience. The relations which he has in mind are both conjunctive and disjunctive, and include nextness, similarity and difference, tendency, causality, purpose, identity, and continuation. The relations are themselves capable of being experienced, and so are just as real as anything else under

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[30] As James puts it in *Some Problems*, Hume's empiricism made "events rattle against their neighbours as drily as if they were dice in a box" (1910, SPP: 100). See Klein (2009) for a detailed description of Hume's atomism and James's rejection of it.

[31] The name which Peirce gives to realism about continuity is "synechism". James is quite clear that he holds this view, which he also attributes to Bergson. But Peirce disagreed on both James and Bergson's articulation of the theory. See footnote 4.

the radical empirical hypothesis.[32]   James compares his own view, in which these relations are real and objective, with rationalism and traditional empiricism:

> [Relations] are undeniable parts of pure experience; yet, while common sense and what I call radical empiricism stand for their being objective, both rationalism and the usual empiricism claim that they are exclusively the "work of the mind" (1905, ERE: 74).

Radical empiricism is the view that reality demonstrates an experiential unity through relations and continuities which are themselves experiential and objective (1905, ERE: 53; 1909, MT: 7), and which are independent of any individual or set of minds (1904, ERE: 40). And by presenting this view James is not only rejecting monistic idealism, but also nominalism.[33]

As well as his commitment to objective relations between objects, James holds that we can discern general empirical "laws of nature", such as "heat melts ice" and "salt preserves meat". These are the kinds of empirical discoveries which, on a long enough time line, become common-sense beliefs in the pragmaticist sense (§5).[34] James does not attribute the reality of such laws to the activity of human minds, but rather to the "habitudes of concrete things" (1890, PP 1: 1233), or the "immutable habits which the different elementary sorts of matter follow" (1890, PP 1: 125). Like Peirce, then, James tends to attribute a principle of habit to matter as well as to organic beings, and is even occasionally tempted by a Peircean type cosmology in which these regularities grew over time from a period of relative chaos (1909, EPH: 369).[35] Overall, James appears committed to the ontological reality of continuity, generality, and laws.[36]

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[32] See ERE: 23-4; IV.1.3.

[33] According to Peirce himself, this radical empiricist view would disqualify James from being an ontological nominalist. He tells us that

> nominalists generally do not admit that there is any similarity in things apart from the mind; but they may admit that this exists, provided that they deny that it constitutes any unity among the things apart from the mind. They cannot admit the latter and remain consistent nominalists (1902, CP6.377).

We will return to the issue of whether or not James's picture allows for the objectivity he claims in the fourth chapter (IV.3).

[34] James does hold that we must adopt our belief in the uniformity of nature *as a whole* on seemingly *a priori* grounds, before we can begin to inquire into nature as discover these more "proximate" laws (1890, PP 2: 1233-4). The belief in the uniformity of nature as a whole cannot be derived from experience, but rather serve as conditions for our inquiries into nature. For more on James's account of the *a priori*, see Klein (2016).

[35] Cf. Peirce (1898, CP6.209; CP6.262ff); and James (1904, ERE: 18; 1905, ERE: 74).

[36] Haack (1997) agrees that James admits the reality of real generals, but holds that his is still a nominalistic position because he holds that concepts can be reduced to particulars. James does hold that concepts are abstracted from experience, and that they are applicable in particular cases.

§6.2 PERCEPTUAL NOMINALISM

It is difficult to separate James's metaphysical view from his work on perception and experience. This is because James thinks that experience *is* the "stuff" of which reality is composed (1904, ERE: 4; IV.1). This might cause problems for the realist reading of James, however, as he appears to hold a nominalist account of perception. The nominalist tends to think of immediate experience as a kind of "chaotic torrent of independent data" which is subsequently categorised and organised by subjects on the basis of their personal interests. Nothing objective corresponds to the conceptual categorisations these subjects use to differentiate the originary experiential confusion, as they are merely the products of personal convenience. As such they cannot be "real" in Peirce's sense of being independent of personal opinion (Forster 2011: 4-5; Peirce 1898 CP4.1).

It is easy to interpret James as this kind of nominalist when we remember his famous statement that experience in its immediacy is a "blooming, buzzing confusion" (1890, PP 1: 462), and his assertions that we tend to make order out of this chaos by reference to our interests, and a certain amount of "arbitrary choice" (1907, P: 119). According to James the "cuts we make [in the "perceptual flux"] are purely ideal" (1910, SPP: 32):

> the world we feel and live in, will be that which our ancestors and we, by slowly cumulative strokes of choice, have extricated out of this, as the sculptor extracts his statue by simply rejecting the other portions of the stone. Other sculptors, other statues from the same stone! Other minds, other worlds from the same chaos! (1879, EPs: 51-52).

James's position, then, seems to be that sensation or experience is at base chaotic, and that we make distinctions in this chaos according to our interests.[37]

However, the story is not that simple. James is careful to never suggest that the distinctions we draw within our perception refer to nothing real. In his *Principles*, James does not tell us that we *make* distinctions through interest, but that we *detect* them by using our interest (1890, PP 1: 481). Real distinctions in our environment are either

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Concepts are not the only generals, though, for James. Continuity of experience does not seem to be easily reducible to particulars on James's account. And Haack does not present her evidence for thinking that on James's account concepts *are* reducible to particulars. It seems obvious that, for James as well as Peirce, any general concept will be applicable to an indefinite number of cases without being exhausted.

[37] It is not just James's critics who attribute this kind of nominalism to him, but often his defenders too. Bailey, for instance, holds this interpretation of James's anti-intellectualism: "Concepts do not, at bottom, properly describe the flux of thought and reality, since they necessarily divide it up arbitrarily – it has no joints at which to be cut" (Bailey, 1999: 151).

practically salient to us, and so interesting, or they are not. Practical interest makes us attend to certain elements of the environment, and ignore others. Through practice and training, we can learn to attend to distinctions within the environment which are not of immediate practical interest to us, but which are nonetheless still objective distinctions (1890, PP1: 481; 487).

Making these conceptual distinctions is necessary for navigating the sensible flux of pure experience. Without being able to distinguish between features of experience on the basis of practical interest, or some other purpose, we would be lost in a sea of sensation. Conceptualisation works by taking some aspect of experience, and making it essential (1890, PP 1: 274-5). In this way, we can perform all kinds of functions and operations on raw experience which prove to be useful. Just like our experience, the concepts which we use to organise it can themselves appear to be disordered and chaotic. However, in time, we come to see that there are inferential relations which connect these concepts, and so we begin to trace order in the conceptual realm also (1904, ERE: 9-10). James treats concepts, and the inferential relations which obtain between them, as a "co-ordinate realm" of reality, just as real as percepts (1909, MT: 32). This is another sense in which James is committed to ontological realism about generals.[38]

What sense, then, should we make of James's assertion that the cuts we make in the sensible flux are "merely ideal"? In making this statement, James is contrasting the ideality of concepts with the real continuity of sensory experience. When they are not mistaken or misapplied, concepts respond to objective distinctions in our environment. But though concepts are useful, real, and track something objective in the environment, we should not think of concepts as definitively representing reality. Sensible reality is continuous, complex, and plural in a way that concepts are incapable of grasping. In *Some Problems*, James puts it this way:

> The great difference between percepts and concepts is that percepts are continuous and concepts are discrete. Not discrete in their *being*, for conception as an *act* is part of the flux of feeling, but discrete from each other in their several *meanings* (1910, SPP: 32).

Concepts are discrete from one another in a way that is not representative of sensible experience. Concepts can contradict each other, and we can trace their differences in a relatively exact fashion. In sensible reality, on the other hand,

> [the] boundaries are no more distinct than are those of the field of vision [...] whatever we distinguish and isolate conceptually is found perceptually to telescope and compenetrate and diffuse into its neighbours (1910, SPP: 32).

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[38] See 1902, VRE: 54.

The cuts we make through conceptualisation, then, are "ideal" in the sense that they make exact differences which are, in sensation, vague.

James, then, does not seem committed to a nominalistic account of perception so much as he is committed to pluralistic account of experience. It is not the case that there are no objective discriminations to be made in our experience, or that our concepts refer to nothing real. It is in fact the opposite: there are too many such distinctions for *all* of them to be detected and attended to, and they are continuous and vague in ways that concepts can often miss. [39] No conceptual system will be able to completely grasp the totality of our sensory reality, because some information escapes any attempt at conceptualisation. We shape the world of our lived experience by attending to some objective discriminations, and not to others.

§6.3 EPISTEMOLOGICAL NOMINALISM

The nominalist does not believe that concepts and propositions about general laws can be judged to be "true" or "false", but only "useful" or "not useful". Again, this is because there is nothing in reality which the propositions or concepts are true *of*. As Forster puts it: "for nominalists, laws and general concepts are artefacts of economizing minds to which nothing in reality literally corresponds" (2011: 5).

James is routinely criticised for his conception of truth for just this reason. James seems to suggest that truth is what is "expedient" or useful for us to believe (1907, P: 106). As it appears possible to separate truth and usefulness, given the prevalence of useful false beliefs, critics tend to see James as being led to a highly subjectivist position in which it is legitimate for us to believe anything we find useful, regardless of its truth. This is not the place to deal with such a vexed topic conclusively. Here I aim only to indicate that James was not a nominalist in this regard.

James's treatment of truth emerges from his application of the pragmatic maxim. He is arguing against people who explain truth by appealing to a proposition's "self-transcending" capacity to refer to an object beyond itself. James finds such talk metaphysically confusing, and in need of pragmatic elucidation (1904, ERE: 27; 1909, MT: 61). Pragmatist analysis suggests that the practical effects of some belief being "true" would be that it allowed us to operate successfully in the world, and that we would

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[39] Steven Levine makes the first point well in his recent article, where he says that "[w]hat is important to realize is that for James the sensory flux is a much-at-onceness that contains a *plenitude* or *overabundance* of qualities and relations" (Levine 2013: 129).

encounter no problems if we continued to act according to it. A proposition is true if it would lead us through a series of experiences to a verification of it (e.g. 1904, ERE: 14; 1907, ERE: 146-7). James does not deny that concepts and propositions need to agree with reality. He just elaborates what that relation means pragmatically. It means to be put in *"working touch"* with reality (1907, P: 102).

Taking a concept to be true pragmatically involves making a series of predictions about what kinds of experiences we will encounter. So, to test a concept's truth, we can see if it is an accurate predictor of future experience. If our predications are successful, and in practical cases that means *useful*, then we have good reason for suspecting that the concept is true. James clarifies his position in *The Meaning of Truth*, where he makes the following realist sounding statements:

> The pragmatic calls satisfaction indispensable for truth-building, but I have everywhere called them insufficient unless reality be also incidentally lead to (1909, MT: 106).

> [T]hat their objects should be really there, is the very condition of [concepts] having that kind of utility (1909, MT: 112).

> [The] notion of a reality independent of either of us, taken from ordinary social experience, lies at the base of the pragmatist definition of truth. With some such reality any statement, in order to be counted true, must agree (1909, MT: 117).

So, though James is committed to the position that usefulness is a marker of truth, he is also committed to the position that what is most useful, at least in the long run, is for our ideas to agree with reality. If our ideas do *not* agree with reality, they will inflict "endless inconsistency and frustration" until they do (1907, P: 101). In this regard, James explicitly called himself an "epistemological realist" (1909, MT: 106).[40]

There is a second way in which James might be considered an epistemological nominalist. Careless expression on James's part can make it seem as if the pragmatist holds that the truth of a concept is determined by the practical difference it makes within the experience of an *individual*. In *Pragmatism*, for instance, James states that the purpose

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[40] See also James's letter to C. A. Strong, 1st of June 1907:

> Schiller, Dewey and I are all (I, at any rate) epistemological realists, - the reality known exists independently of the knower's idea, and *as* conceived, if the conception be a true one. I can see that some bad parturient phrases of my radical empiricism might lead to an opposite interpretation, but if so they must be expunged. As a pragmatist I have not given a word of excuse for such an interpretation (1907, CWJ11: 372).

See also Perry (1935, 2: 536).

of philosophy is to determine what "definite difference it will make to you and me […] if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one" (1907, P: 30). Peirce, in comparison, holds that truth is independent of the "vagaries" of individual opinion, and emerges only within a *community* of inquiry, over time (1868, W2:239; 1878, W3:284-5). This individualistic move by the pragmatists who followed him greatly concerned Peirce, as he thought it incompatible with realism (1908, CP6.485).[41]

However, James's considered view on this matter is closer to Peirce's than it seems. James does aim to provide a meaningful place for individuals within philosophical inquiry. But he does *not* hold this individualism to be a rejection of realism. Explaining exactly how these two features of his philosophy are compatible will be part of the project of the thesis as a whole. Here it will be sufficient to note that though James admits that he sometimes writes, for "the sake of simplicity", as if the experience of one individual were sufficient for the verification of a philosophical hypothesis, he maintained that any question of significant scope required "the experience of the entire human race" and the "co-operation of generations" to be verified (1882, WB: 87-8). James kept this position throughout his mature work, where he frequently asserts that the pragmatist defines truth in terms of what is satisfactory, not to an individual, but in "the long run and on the whole" (1909, MT: 9).[42]

So, though James habitually talks about *individual* truth, he is careful to separate what appears and functions as true *for us*, from our individual and fallible position, and what would be found to be true in the experience of human beings in the long run. The latter is what James calls "absolute truth", meaning "what no farther experience will ever alter" (1907, P: 106; see 1909, MT: 143).[43]

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[41] According to Misak, this opposition between truth "as a product of the individual" and truth "as a product of the community over time" is what is "at the heart of the dispute between James and Peirce" (Misak, 2013: 60).

[42] Though we should not interpret James as suggesting that the truth of a philosophical proposition can be definitively proved or disproved within one person's experience, there are still clear and interesting points of disagreements between James and Peirce in this area. The two thinkers obviously disagree on the exact nature and extent of individual's contribution to inquiry, on the kinds and breadth of experience which is considered relevant to philosophical inquiry (cf. Misak 2013: 67-71); and on what counts as the right community for accessing philosophical beliefs (cf. Klein 2013). Many of these issues will be dealt with in later chapters.

[43] We can see James's position expressed in full in the following long passage:

> To say that our thought does not "make" this reality means pragmatically that if our own particular thought were annihilated the reality would still be there in some shape, tho possibly it might be a shape that would lack something that our thought supplies. That reality is "independent" means that there is something in every experience that escapes our arbitrary control. If it be a sensible experience it coerces our attention; if a sequence, we cannot invert it; if we compare two terms we can come to only one result. There is a push, an urgency, within our

The aim here is not to prove or disprove James's pragmatic account of truth. The aim is only to show that James is an epistemological realist in the sense Peirce requires. In the very same *Monist* paper in which Peirce sets up his division between pragmatism and pragmaticism, we find Peirce asserting that we must talk about truth and falsity in the practical terms of doubt and belief:

> You only puzzle yourself by talking of the metaphysical "truth" and metaphysical "falsity," that you know nothing about. All you have any dealings with are your doubts and beliefs […] If your terms "truth" and "falsity" are taken in such senses as to be definable in terms of doubt and belief and the course of experience (as for example they would be, if you were to define the "truth" as that to a belief in which belief would tend if it were to tend indefinitely toward absolute fixity), well and good: in that case, you are only talking about doubt and belief […] Your problems would be greatly simplified, if, instead of saying that you want to know the "Truth," you were simply to say that you want to attain a state of belief unassailable by doubt (1905, CP5.416).

Peirce is denying the same transcendent accounts of truth that James is. Belief for the pragmatist is a habit of action, and real doubt is the interruption of that habit. If we have a belief that works, then we hold it to be true, at least for us, and at least for now. An absolutely true belief would be one which allowed us to act successfully and which would never encounter a real doubt. None of this is different from James's position.

Perhaps the biggest difference *in expression* between the two positions is that whereas Peirce talks about a true belief as one which *would* be unassailable by doubt, James often talks about a true belief as one which *will* actually not encounter problems. This subtle

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> very experience, against which we are on the whole powerless, and which drives us in a direction that is the destiny of our belief. That this drift of experience itself is in the last resort due to something independent of all possible experience may or may not be true. There may or may not be an extra-experiential "ding an sich" that keeps the ball rolling, or an "absolute" that lies eternally behind all the successive determinations which human thought has made. But within our experience *itself* at any rate […] some determinations show themselves as being independent of others; some questions, if we ever ask them, can only be answered in one way; some beings, if we ever suppose them, must be supposed to have existed previously to the supposing; some relations, if they exist ever, must exist as long as their terms exist. (1909, MT: 45-46).

James here expresses his realism in a way that makes it clear that it meets Peirce's definition. James's view is that there is something within experience which is not reducible to our "arbitrary control", and which, over time, drives us to converge on particular beliefs. We can also see in this passage not only James's epistemological realism, but his refusal to provide an account of this realism in terms of anything *trans-experiential.* Exactly how we maintain this realism by appealing only to features of experience will be the subject of Chapter IV.

difference has serious consequences. In fact, one element of scholastic realism hinges on the difference.

In later works, Peirce bemoans what he calls his first "nominalistic" expression of the pragmatic maxim. In "How to Make Our Ideas Clear", Peirce presented the view that a diamond is hard if nothing actually *will* scratch it:

> [L]et us ask what we mean by calling a thing *hard.* Evidently that it will not be scratched by many other substances. The whole conception of this quality, as of every other, lies in its conceived effects. There is absolutely no difference between a hard thing and a soft thing so long as they are not brought to the test (Peirce 1878, W3: 266).

This position is nominalistic because it denies that there are general laws about diamonds which obtain even in the absence of *actually* being tested.

The importance of the subjunctive over the indicative expression, then, is that it recognises that there are real generals and real possibility, such that something *would* be the case *if* some event occurred, even if it actually does not. This is why Peirce later changes his view to say that any diamond which was destroyed before having been brought to the test should still be considered hard, because it *would* have resisted scratching had it been tested (1905, CP7.453).[44]

James did not tend to express his pragmatism with this distinction in mind, and he often favourably quoted Peirce's first "nominalistic" expression of the pragmatic maxim. This might lead us to suspect that James continued to hold the original, indicative interpretation of it. However, there are plenty of instances in which James confirms that it is the *second*, subjunctive expression he would agree to. For instance, in expressing three different kinds of cognitive relation which can obtain between knower and known object, James suggests that one is that "the known object is a *possible* experience either of that subject or another, to which the said conjunctive transitions *would* lead, if sufficiently prolonged" (1904, ERE: 27). In an interview of 1908, James explicitly tells his audience that "truth is constituted by [some proposition's] verifiability, not by the act of verification". Here, James explicitly denied the indicative interpretation, stating that to believe otherwise would commit you to absurdities such as the proposition that no one could be considered mortal until they had died (1908, ML: 442). Seeing as James is a realist about cognitive relations of this kind, he is also a realist about possibility in the way Peirce's realism requires.[45]

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[44] See Hookway (1997b: 153).

[45] James frequently expressed realism about possibility, chance, and novelty, usually against the determinist or the intellectual monist (1884, WB: 114ff; 1910, SPP: 76ff). He often connected this realism about possibility or chance with his theory of pluralism, holding that no true monist could be such a realist (1897, WB: 6; 1907, P: 78; 1910, SPP: 72-75), as well as connecting it to Peirce's

Overall, then, James appears to have rejected ontological, perceptual, and epistemological nominalism. He has shown himself to be a realist about generals, about continuity, about habits, and about relations. Therefore, I think we can conclude that James meets the sixth and final criterion Peirce sets out to be recognised as a "pragmaticist".

§7. CONCLUSION

In the *Monist* papers of 1905, Peirce presents a detailed account of a more precise version of pragmatism he called "pragmaticism". It was his aim in doing this to separate himself from other pragmatists, such as William James, whose expressions of pragmatism he found too broad or misapplied. This set the stage for scholars in years to come to separate Peircean and Jamesian pragmatisms, often on the grounds Peirce himself set out, and in particular on the grounds of realism. In this chapter I have argued that, in actual fact, James meets the six criteria Peirce set out in defining pragmaticism: James holds a version of the pragmatic maxim (criterion 1); he meets the "preliminary propositions" of anti-foundationalism, anti-scepticism, and holding that beliefs are habits of action (criterion 2); he applies the scientific method to philosophy (criterion 3); but nonetheless thinks subjects such as metaphysics and logic can be studied (criterion 4); he is a common-sensist of a critical sort (criterion 5); and most importantly (for Peirce, and for this thesis) he is a realist about generals (criterion 6). We should, I conclude, be willing to call James both a "realist" and a "pragmaticist". Hereafter, when I talk about James's pragmatism, and when I defend a pragmatist account of ethics in Part II, I mean pragmatism in precisely this sense.

The aim of this chapter has not been to eradicate all differences between the two thinkers. Their shared pragmaticism aside, we would be hard-pressed to find two figures with more dissimilar philosophical temperaments. One pressing difference which is of

theory of "tychism" (or realism about possibility) (cf. 1902-3, ML: 268ff; 1909, PU: 153). Chance, novelty, and possibility had to be *real* features of the world, according to James. As Richard Bernstein puts it, James saw chance not as

> a name for our ignorance, [or] a sign of a defect in our understanding of the chain
> of causes. The appearance of novelty is rooted in the very character of a
> continuously growing and developing reality (Bernstein, 1977: xxv).

We will return to James's notion of possibility and chance in later chapters (IV.1.5).

particular interest to this thesis is the role of individuals in philosophical inquiry. James was insistent on giving a role to individuals in his pragmaticism, sometimes at the expense of sounding subjectivist. Peirce was insistent on privileging the general in his pragmaticism, sometimes at the expense of denying the role (and even the existence) of the individual. This difference, and how it pertains to ethical inquiry, will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER II:

THE PROBLEM OF "ETHICAL SECONDNESS" IN PEIRCE'S ETHICS

§1. INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in Peirce's ethical thought. Prominent work by Cheryl Misak, Robert Talisse, and many others, have persuasively argued that Peircean pragmatism can provide an interesting account of moral realism, moral cognitivism, and democratic theory.[1] As we have already seen, these Peircean accounts often distance themselves from other forms of pragmatism, such as Jamesian and Deweyan pragmatisms, which are more traditionally associated with ethical and political thought. They do so on the grounds that these accounts are problematically subjectivistic, individualistic, or pluralistic.[2] The previous chapter argued that both Peirce *and* James defended versions of pragmatism which were committed to realism, but observed that James sought to give more of a role to individuals within philosophical inquiry. This chapter explores this difference between the two thinkers, focusing on the

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[1] See Misak (2000, 2004a, 2004b) and Talisse (2003, 2007). See also de Waal and Skowronski (2012) for a recent collection of papers on Peircean ethics, and Parrett (1989) for an older collection.

[2] More moderately, Anderson (1999) argues that Peirce's ethics should be seen as mediating between other pragmatist accounts of ethics and more traditional ethical theory.

problems that arise in Peirce's ethical theory as a result of his rejection of even a moderate form of individualism. Through a historical examination of Peirce's work, I aim to show that Peirce's rejection of individualism means that he rejects something which most accounts of pragmatist ethics take to be fundamental. Contemporary Peirceans must therefore either bite a bullet, and accept some non-pragmatist entailments, or reject large portions of Peirce's actual work on ethics, and so admit that there is little which is distinctively Peircean about their contemporary pragmatist accounts.

The best way to present the rejection in question is to use resources provided by Peirce himself. Adapting Peirce's categories to an ethical sphere, I will suggest that Peirce rejects what I call "ethical secondness". This essentially means that Peirce refuses to give any role to the experience of individuals and their interactions in the formation of our ethical theories and moral practices. This rejection can lead to a certain kind of dogmatism, an incapacity to change our beliefs in the light of the criticism of other people, and a refusal to take seriously the experiences of people who differ from us. This should concern contemporary Peirceans, seeing that pragmatism tends to go hand in hand with fallibilism, empiricism, democratic inquiry, and affording a central role to experience in philosophical inquiry. My claim, then, is tantamount to suggesting that Peirce is guilty in the ethical sphere of that which he accused Hegel of in the metaphysical sphere: "the trifling oversight of forgetting that there is a real world with real actions and reactions" (c.1890, CP 1.368).

It is the job of the next section to introduce Peirce's categories and my application of them, and to articulate this notion of "ethical secondness" (§2). In the following sections I will show Peirce's rejection of ethical secondness at work in three of his central ethical theses: his gap between theory and practice (§3); his hierarchy of the normative sciences (§4); and his notion of the *summum bonum* (§5). I'll consider and reject the possibility that we can find ethical secondness in Peirce's theory of synechism (§6), and finally, I'll consider some responses from contemporary Peirceans (§7). My conclusion will be that any account of pragmatist ethics must leave room for a moderate form of individualism, and that this provides a reason for contemporary Peirceans to engage with a Jamesian account of ethics.

§2. PEIRCE'S CATEGORIES

Peirce had three primary categories, which found articulation at every level of his philosophy. He called these categories "firstness", "secondness" and "thirdness". We can broadly think of the categories as "conceptions" which are drawn from the "logical analysis" of thought and experience, and which are to be "regarded as applicable to being" (c.1894, CP1.300). Though he calls them conceptions here, Peirce often advises against thinking of the categories as "definitive notions", and suggests instead thinking of them as vague "moods or tones of thought" (1887-1888, W6:169). Elsewhere Peirce describes them as the three possible "modes of being" (1903, CP1.21-26). These categories are meant to be collectively exhaustive and completely interdependent (1885, W5:238). In every application of the categories to a particular subject matter of philosophy, Peirce is insistent that each of the three be taken seriously, and he sees any theory which does not do so as deficient. For this reason, I suggest that Peirce himself ought to be committed to what I call in this chapter "ethical secondness".

Peircean categories are complex and multifaceted, but for the purposes of this chapter it will be sufficient to have a basic outline. Speaking very generally, "firstness" refers to some aspect of reality which is immediate and spontaneous in the sense of having no reference to anything other than itself (1886, W5:299; c.1897, CP1.356; 1891, 6.32). "Secondness" refers to some aspect of reality which *does* have a reference to some other (1887-1888, W6:171). According to Peirce, all experience is of the nature of secondness, because an experience is best understood as something independent of us, which compels us, surprises us, or is forced upon us (1887-1888, W6:172; 1886, W5:379; 1906, 4.530; 1901, 5.567; 1900, 8.101). Individual existence is also a matter of secondness, as to exist is to be in a "dynamical relation" with "some experiential universe" (1903, CP1.329). "Thirdness" refers to the *general* aspects of reality. Peirce uses "thirdness" to refer to generals, universals, laws, concepts, and habits (1887-1888, W6:173). We have already seen that Peirce holds realism about thirdness to be a necessary feature of pragmaticism.

These broad categories articulate themselves differently when applied to different subject areas. In logic, firstness refers to one-place relations (monads), secondness to two-place relations (dyads), and thirdness to three place relations (triads) (c.1894, CP1.293). In psychology, firstness refers to subjective feeling, secondness to reaction, and thirdness to conception (1891, CP6.32). In phenomenology, firstness corresponds to felt qualities, secondness to the feeling of resistance and struggle, and thirdness to law, growth and continuity (c.1894, CP1.304; c.1903, 1.322f; 1903, 5.45). Perhaps the clearest application of the categories occurs in Peirce's metaphysics. Here firstness refers to chance, potentiality and the qualities of feeling. Secondness refers to actuality, existence,

and the reactions between things. Thirdness refers to generality, continuity and representation.

Peirce thought that these broad metaphysical categories were exhaustive, and that their possible combinations delimited the seven possible systems of metaphysics. Accepting only the reality of firstness, or chance, was nihilism. Accepting only the reality of secondness, or existence and reaction, was deterministic mechanism. And accepting only the reality of thirdness, or generality, was Platonism. Nominalists, as we have seen, accept firstness and secondness, but make the mistake of rejecting the reality of thirdness. Cartesianism and nineteenth century physics made the mistake of rejecting the reality of qualities of feeling, and so firstness. And Hegelianism makes the mistake of subsuming firstness and secondness to generality, or thirdness (c.1903, CP 5.79-81; 5.79n52; c1903, EP2.180). Peirce's own substantive metaphysical account accepts the reality of all three categories, and amounts to a cosmological picture in which reality begins with pure chance or chaos, and evolves over time towards complete regularity (1891, CP6.33).[3]

It is my contention that we can usefully apply these categories to ethics. Like the other particular applications which we have seen, the categories in the ethical sphere will articulate themselves distinctively. I suggest that firstness in ethics will concern the private feelings of the self, secondness in ethics will concern the relations between some actual individual and other individuals, and thirdness in ethics will concern the general ideals, habits and laws which govern our moral behaviours.[4] In what follows, I'll refer to taking ethical categories as "fundamental", by which I mean irreducible to explanations in terms of the other categories. The pragmatists, I suggest, should hold all three ethical categories as fundamental, in the same way as they should be realists about all three categories in the metaphysical sphere.

With these vague ethical categories in hand, we can extrapolate seven possible combinations, as Peirce did with metaphysics, and produce seven possible systems of ethics. Going through these combinations will give a clearer idea of how I am applying the categories to ethics.

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[3] This is a notion which we will see return in Peirce's picture of the *summum bonum* (§5).

[4] Due to the vague nature of the categories, and the multiple ways which they are articulated in Peirce's philosophy, it seems likely that we could apply the categories to the ethical sphere differently. Here I have tried to apply the categories to the ethical sphere in a way which is analogous the way they are applied in the logical and metaphysical sphere. I think there is interesting research to be done concerning how best to apply the categories, and I have not argued for my own application here. Ultimately, even if Peirce scholars disagree with my interpretation of the ethical categories, the problem I have identified still remains. Peirce still rejects any role in his ethics for the actual actions and interactions of individual agents, and this still leads to problems, whether or not we call this "ethical secondness".

Any ethical system which accepted only firstness, and so the feeling of the self, as fundamental would be a form of solipsism, egoism, or hedonism. We might also think that crude forms of existentialism, anarchism, or libertarianism which emphasise only the freedom of the self might fall into this camp. An ethics which accepted only secondness would prioritise the self-other relation as fundamental. Thinkers such as Levinas or Løgstrup, who put the encounter with "the other" as fundamental to our ethics, present examples of such a system.[5] An ethics which saw only thirdness as fundamental would privilege the attainment of general and ideal goods above anything else. Platonism, for instance, as the view that The Good is attained by transcending the personal and interpersonal aspects of our lives, is perhaps the most obvious example of this species of ethics. Kantianism can also be presented in this light, as the view that we should act under a general and universal moral law, regardless of any existential, interpersonal, or personal considerations.[6]

An ethics which considered both firstness and secondness as fundamental would consider the empowerment of individuals within their environment and community as central. We might think that a charitable reading of Nietzsche's work can give us this kind of ethics. An ethical system which considers firstness and thirdness as fundamental would be interested in the achievement of general ideas through self-directed acts. Aristotelianism, as the view that human flourishing is the aim of our ethical lives, and that to attain this end we must habituate in ourselves certain general virtues, is a version of this type of system. Finally, a system which accepted only secondness and thirdness as fundamental would deny the importance of the feelings of the private self entirely. Utilitarianism, for instance, abstracts away from individual feelings to calculate how happiness should be distributed between individuals (secondness), in order to generate the greatest good for the greatest number (thirdness).[7]

These considerations are speculative and vague, and should not be taken as suggesting that there aren't complex or moderate views of each of the ethical theories mentioned above which could incorporate the missing ethical categories. No doubt Peirce thought the same when he laid out the seven systems of metaphysics. The aim here is just to illustrate the ethical categories and their possible combinations, not to provide a detailed assessment of any philosophy on these grounds. In what follows I shall suggest that

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[5] More recent examples of this other-directed ethics might include the ethics of care defended by Carol Gilligan (1982), and the second-personal ethics defended by Stephen Darwall (2006; 2013a; 2013b). We shall see that James appears to advocate a form of second-personal ethics in his discussion of obligation (V.7).

[6] See Løgstrup (1956/1997); Levinas (1967/1969); Plato (e.g. *Symposium* 200a-204c); Kant (1785/2011).

[7] See Nietzsche (1886/2008; 1887/2008); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*; Mill (1861/2008).

Peirce rejects ethical secondness as fundamental, and that this leads to problems which should concern the pragmatist.

Before we move to a more detailed examination of Peirce's ethics, it will be useful to get clearer on what I mean by "ethical secondness". We should think of this broad category in two ways. The first way is to think about the types of *ends* or *perspectives* a theory allows for. Holding secondness as fundamental is to suggest that there are other-directed ends and perspectives which are of ethical importance. Examples include: seeing that someone is in need, and being motivated to help them; respecting another person or culture for their differences, not just for commonalities; allowing other people to make ethical claims on us; changing beliefs in light of external criticism or sensitivity to others; and acting in the best interests of another person or group with no other agenda.[8] The second way to think about ethical secondness concerns the kinds of *approaches to ethical inquiry* we consider valid. Whereas firstness in ethical inquiry will consider subjective feeling, introspection, and self-habituation to be important, and thirdness will place the emphasis on theoretical reasoning as guiding us to ethical truth, a theory which takes secondness to be fundamental will provide a role to the actions and interactions of individuals. In this sense, holding secondness as fundamental is to suggest that the actual interactions and lived experience of moral agents is relevant to ethical inquiry.

§3. THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

I will now move on to analysing Peirce's main work on ethics, and showing that he rejects "ethical secondness". We can split Peirce's ethical work into two: the Cambridge Conference Lectures of 1898, and the Harvard Lowell Lectures of 1903.[9] This section will focus on the former, and the gap between theory and practice which Peirce articulated there. According to Peirce we should both insulate our ethical practices from our theoretical inquiry, and our ethical theory from our practical interests. Whereas our theoretical lives should be governed by reason, our practical lives should be governed

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[8] "Ethical secondness" in this first sense appears to be similar to what Koopman (2005) means by *personal* or *interpersonal* practices of freedom. Koopman sees James's "personalism" as a mid-ground between romantic individualism (what I would call "firstness"), and the institutionalism or socialism which dominates contemporary pragmatic accounts (what I would call "thirdness"). I suspect, however, that Koopman goes too far when he suggests that "James revolted whenever he saw a rule being substituted for a personality" (Koopman, 2005: 181). James thinks that social institutions, habits, norms and concepts are necessary parts of our ethical lives, but that we ought to challenge them when they become too restrictive. See VI.3.5.

[9] See Herdy (2014) for a detailed historical account of how Peirce's ideas developed and changed.

by the sentiments. Anyone who ignores this division will not only "obstruct the advance of pure science" but also "endanger his own moral integrity and that of his readers" (1898, CP1.619).[10]

Peirce is insistent that if philosophy is to be taken seriously, it must be treated as an objective science like any other. Pure science is not interested in the possible practical ramifications of inquiry, but only in truth for truth's sake.[11] This is particularly important in a subject such as ethics, where the subject matter is so close to our practical interests that it is easy for inquiry to degenerate into the mere rationalisation of beliefs that we already hold.[12] Peirce diagnosed the "infantile" state of moral philosophy at the time as resulting from philosophers being "inflamed with a desire to amend the lives of themselves and others", rather than nurturing the cool detachment and objectivity of the laboratory (1898, CP1.620). No science should be governed by the practical concerns of individual inquirers or their particular communities, as it is unlikely that making science hinge on such short-term practical interests will lead to truth in the long run (1898, CP1.640-1).

Treating ethics as a science also prevents us from taking propositions which we are entertaining in theoretical inquiry and applying them to our practical lives. This is because, according to Peirce, propositions entertained in scientific inquiry should not be considered "beliefs" in the full sense. For a pragmatist, a belief is that upon which we are prepared to *act*.[13] In science, however, the propositions that we investigate are hypothetical and provisional, and are held ready to be discarded the moment experience refutes them (1898, CP1.635). The distinction is clear in the following:

> I certainly do think that *holding for true* is of two kinds; the one is that practical holding for true which alone is entitled to the name of Belief, while the other is that acceptance of a proposition which in the intention of pure science always remains provisional (1898, EP2.56).[14]

As such, Peirce thinks that our theoretical ideas are "far too dubious" to be brought into our practical lives (1898, CP1.620).[15]

Our practical lives should be governed by our moral sentiments, rather than by theoretical reason. This is a position Peirce calls "sentimentalism", and which he defines

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[10] It has often been noted that this is an odd position for a pragmatist to take. As Krois writes: "[i]t seems off that the man who made widespread the idea that the meaning of concepts consists in their conceivable practical bearing [...] claimed that practice had to be so strictly separated [from theory]" (1994: 27).

[11] c.1896, CP1.44-5; 1898, CP1.635.

[12] c.1896, CP1.57; 1898, 1.643; 1898, CP5.583.

[13] 1903, CP5.27; I.2; I.3.

[14] See also c.1903, CP7.606.

[15] See Trammell (1972), for a detailed historical analysis of the 1898 position.

as "not trusting to reasonings about questions of vital importance but rather to hereditary instincts and traditional sentiments" (1898, CP1.661). Unlike other sentimentalists, Peirce does not postulate an innate moral sense, or universal human nature, to explain these sentiments.[16] We should instead think of moral sentiments as representing a kind of "composite photograph" of a community's experience (1898, CP1.573). The sentiments of a community evolve over a great deal of time, and serve to orient the actions of individuals in matters of ethical importance.[17] It is clear from this description that Peirce's sentimentalism is connected with the notion of common-sensism he subsequently defended in 1903.[18]

Though these moral sentiments and the judgements they produce are *theoretically* fallible and subject to revision on a long enough time frame, for any actual person in their practical lives they should be treated as indubitable and infallible (1898, CP1.661). The reasoning of actual individuals is seen by Peirce as egoistic and highly fallible, and so not to be trusted in matters of importance (1898, CP1.623-31). Peirce actually suggests that it is the mark of an immoral person to trust their own reasoning in matters of morality, and that this tendency at work within a society can lead to devastating social problems.[19] Conversely, a moral person is one who "obeys the traditional maxims of [their] community without hesitation or discussion" (1898, CP1.666). It is with this in mind that Peirce links sentimentalism with conservatism (1898, CP1.662).

Though the division between theory and practice which Peirce postulates might seem intractable, Peirceans have shown that there is room for the practical and the theoretical

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[16] Hutcheson (1725/2004) postulates an innate moral sense, shared by all, and Hume (1739-40/2000) and Smith (1759-90/1984) postulate an innate tendency for sympathy which is the product of a universal human nature. See Frazer (2010) for a historical overview of moral sentimentalism. As yet, there is no comparative study which examines the similarities and differences between pragmatist sentimentalism and traditional moral sentimentalism.

[17] Peirce can thus be seen as closer to modern evolutionary sentimentalists, like Haidt (2001). Peirce, however, will not think that the evolution of our sentiments is responsive solely to Darwinian pressures.

[18] See I.2; I.5.

[19] Negative consequences of allowing individuals to reason about their moral lives include perversion and licentiousness:

> When men begin to rationalize about their conduct, the first effect is to deliver them over to their passions and produce the most frightful demoralization, especially in sexual matters. Thus, among the Greeks, it brought about paederasty and a precedence of public women over private wives. But ultimately the subconscious part of the soul, being stronger, regains its predominance and insists on setting matters right (1898, CP1.57).

The sentiments are unconscious and, thus, uncritical and indubitable common-sense ideas, whereas making these sentiments conscious makes them more subject to error, and allows merely individual passions to dictate conduct.

dimensions of our lives to influence each other. Any scientific inquiry will have to rely on a wide array of background assumptions and practices, which will include the moral sentiments. Further, any community embarking on a scientific inquiry will require the moral sentiments in order to cooperate.[20] We can also appeal to the sentiments to generate hypotheses for theoretical investigation.[21] On the other side of the division, Peirce sometimes suggests that when scientific beliefs have held ground for long enough, we can bring them into our practical lives.[22] Peirce sums up this kind of thought when he tells us that

> I do not say that philosophical science should not ultimately influence [...] morality; I only say that it should be allowed to do so only with secular slowness and the most conservative caution (1898, CP1.620).

There is room, then, for a modest account of the gap.[23]

However, seeing as Peirce considers it immoral for individuals to use their individual reason in practical matters, it remains mysterious how, even on a modest account, the results of theoretical inquiry can be legitimately applied to practical matters. One possible answer is found in Peirce's comments about ethical and mathematic inquiries being analogous. The objects of both inquiries are what Peirce calls "eternal forms". By considering these forms in theoretical inquiry, these forms come to:

> gradually reach the core of one's being; and come to influence our lives; and this they will do, not because they involve truths of merely vital importance, but because they are ideal and eternal verities (1898, CP1.648).

The contemplation of eternal forms in ethical inquiry comes, subconsciously and through "slow percolation", to influence our sentiments and conduct. Once an inquirer becomes "inflated" with the idea of these general and eternal truths, then their concerns about matters of merely vital importance will come to be seen as "a very low kind of importance, indeed" (1898, CP1.647). Eternal ethical truth, then, is seen as far more important than its possible practical application.

Peirce is not advocating a kind of *a priori* approach to ethical inquiry. Like any science, ethical inquiry must be responsive to experience. Experience, as we have seen, is that element which compels us, forces us, or surprises us. But experience comes in two types:

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[20] See Hookway (1997a: 203-6)

[21] 1903, CP5.172-4; 1898, 1.634.

[22] See Misak (2004b: 163-4); 1898, CP5.589.

[23] Feibleman articulates this modest position in the following: "[t]he direction of ethics as a theoretical study is away from instinct and towards reason, but, until its findings reach a dependable stage, instinct must still be the guide to conduct, at least in its most vital decisions and actions" (1943:107).

internal and *external*. External experience concerns the things, relations, and interactions with a world external to our thoughts which resists us and compels us to think in certain ways. Internal experience is experience of the world of concepts, thoughts and ideas, which despite being internal can still surprise and compel us (c.1898, CP7.483). When pursuing logical or mathematical inquiry, we experiment on images and diagrams of thought rather than upon external things. But these diagrams and their relations are in no way "up to us", and we still *discover*, rather than create, logical and mathematical truths as a result of internal experience. His comparison with mathematical inquiry indicates that it is internal, rather than external, experience which is relevant to ethical inquiry.

We can see that even on a modest reading of his 1898 position, Peirce rejects ethical secondness. The two primary features of his ethics at this stage are his sentimentalism and the pursuit of general and eternal ethical truths. It is through the examination of internal experience, rather than through any experience of actual moral agents and their interactions, that ethical inquiry is pursued. We might think that the lived experience of individuals involved in moral practice might count as a relevant kind of external experience, but this is rejected by Peirce on the grounds that scientific inquiry must remain insulated from actual practical concerns. The inclusion of individual reason in practical matters, either in self-reflection or in the discussion between moral agents, is also completely rejected by Peirce. Our judgments are determined by our sentiments, and our sentiments change, if they change at all, through unconscious rather than conscious forces.

There are two problems which emerge from Peirce's rejection of ethical secondness. The first problem concerns moral conflict. Peirce's moral sentiments are akin to common-sense beliefs about objects. In our everyday lives, our pre-theoretical views about physical objects are sufficient for our everyday practical needs. We might make perceptual mistakes, but rarely do we need to argue about what *counts* as an object. It is only in relation to specific theoretical questions that our common-sense beliefs are shown to be insufficient. This is how Peirce thinks about the moral sentiments. The problem with this analogy is that our pre-theoretical sentiments about morality show significantly less consensus than our pre-theoretical beliefs about objects. Unlike other sentimentalists, Peirce does not appeal to a universal nature or moral sense to explain the sentiments. Rather, they are a result of different communities' prolonged moral inquiries. Though we might expect or hope for convergence in the long run, as it stands different communities have different moral sentiments, which can often proscribe conflicting behaviours. This is especially true in the modern, multi-cultural world. Dress codes, sexual conduct, and gender roles which are met with approval in one culture, are met with abhorrence in another. In short, the types of practical problems which Peirce

suggests ought to be solved by relying on our moral sentiments, can in fact be caused by different people relying on different moral sentiments.[24]

If we take Peirce at his word, we have two potential options for overcoming genuine moral disagreement. Either we must wait until a suitably detached ethical inquiry has independently reached a stable conclusion about precisely this topic, or we must treat such conflicts as practically intractable. The first answer is, of course, no way to solve any actual conflict. The second answer, however, makes discussion about morality practically no better than discussion about subjective taste, seeing as we are not permitted to appeal to anything more objective than our sentiments when facing conflict. Sole reliance on moral sentiments might even lead to dogmatism. Holding our sentiments to be practically infallible naturally leads to thinking people who disagree with us are straightforwardly wrong. The assurance that our inquiry would reach a stable conclusion if it were indefinitely pursued does not make the current situation any less problematic.

The second problem concerns moral progress. Most pragmatists are meliorists of some stripe. Meliorism is the view that the world can be made better by the direct efforts of individuals.[25] It is evident, however, that Peirce cannot hold this view. The actions and interactions of individuals cannot be seen by Peirce being capable of contributing to the world's improvement. The collective sentiments and behaviours of a community improve over time with no direct action from the individuals within that community (beyond disinterested inquiry). Further, in order to be a science as Peirce conceives of it, ethical inquiry must be insulated from practical interest. As such, any improvements which do result from inquiry will be completely accidental. As a result, Peirce seems compelled to suggest that the study of philosophy, the actions of individuals and groups,

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[24] Stuhr shares a similar worry:

> "[c]ommon sense" in today's world is anything but common or shared. The failure to reconstruct collectively sentiments, values, traditions, and ways of life in light of the results of inquiry contributes to ignorance, prejudice, absolutism, isolation, frustration, and conflict (Stuhr 1994: 11).

Morality *does* often run on sentiment, rather than reason, thinks Stuhr. But this is something which we should strive to overcome, considering the practical problems which it gives rise to: "[i]t is an issue that demands action, rather than a necessary presupposition that demands acceptance" (Stuhr 1994:12).

[25] James links meliorism with pragmatism, as the view between pessimism and optimism (P: 137); see VII.2.3. Dewey too held that pragmatism involved meliorism, as he saw philosophy as a "method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men" (Dewey 1917: 46).

and discussions between them, are all irrelevant to the amelioration of the world. This is certainly an odd position for a pragmatist.[26]

§4. THE NORMATIVE SCIENCES

Most contemporary Peirceans suggest that Peirce's 1898 position was something of an anomaly, and that the 1903 Lowell lectures provides a better grounding for a Peircean account of ethics.[27] There Peirce gives us a clearer idea of what kind of inquiry ethics is, and what role individuals can play within it.

Peirce was concerned in his later life with drawing up a hierarchy of sciences. He did so, in part, by applying his categories to delimit separate areas of study and their relations. Included in this hierarchy, in a foundational role, are the "normative sciences" of logic, ethics, and aesthetics. Normative sciences are defined as sciences which study how phenomena relate to ends. Logic is the study of how we ought to reason in order to reach truth. Ethics is the more general study of what conduct we ought to adopt to reach any end. As such, logic is rooted in ethics.[28] Ethics presupposes some standard by which we

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[26] Bergman notes a similar problem, suggesting that though Peirce is committed to the improvement of the world, he is unable to say that the study of philosophy, ethics, or any individual attempt to improve the world, can contribute to its improvement (Bergman 2012: 133). See §7.

[27] Misak recommends that we should not take Peirce's 1898 lectures on "Vitally Important Matters" seriously, because he was offended by the way in which he was asked to deliver them (Misak 2004b: 164). The Harvard lectures were organised by James for Peirce's benefit, and having seen earlier plans for a very technical series of lectures on logic, he implored Peirce in a letter to "be a good boy and think a more popular plan out" (Dec. 1897, CWJ8: 326). Atkins (2015) believes that the "paradoxes" of the 1898 lecture were caused by the fact that Peirce was in fact offering an occluded criticism of James's *Will to Believe* essays. In particular, Peirce wanted to criticise James's pluralism, his sentimentalist conception of rationality, and what Atkins calls his "rational radicalism". This last is the view that individuals should be permitted to reason about their (moral) beliefs, alter their conduct accordingly, and test the validity of their moral ideas in "the public space" by examining this conduct (Atkins, 2015: 181). As such, if Atkins is correct, Peirce wrote the 1898 lecture in order to renounce ethical secondness. Klein (2015a) also holds that Peirce's position in the 1898 lectures was a response to James's *Will to Believe* position, though he holds the disagreement to be about the appropriate role of faith and passion in hypothesis formation, and the role of belief in scientific inquiry (2015a: 93-97).

[28] As Liszka puts it:

> Since logic is concerned with the correction of thinking towards a standard and [is] essentially concerned with normative claims about the goodness or badness of reasoning, it should be considered a species of ethics (Liszka 2012: 44).

assess ends, and so it is rooted in aesthetics, which is the study of what ends are unconditionally desirable (1903, CP5.123; CP5.129).

When drawing up this hierarchy, Peirce used his categories to delimit particular subject areas and their relations. We can see "secondness" as being involved in the normative science of ethics in three ways. Firstly, ethics studies the *relation* between two things: conduct and ends. Secondly, ethics is about bringing something which is merely possible into *existence*.[29] Thirdly, as a science, ethics must be responsive to a certain kind of *experience*. However, none of this amounts to accepting *ethical* secondness. As we shall see, even in his mature work Peirce still refuses to give any room to the actions and interactions of individuals on his account, or give actions done for the sake of other individuals any ethical weight.

This mature position differs from the earlier position in a number of ways. Ethics, as a theoretical pursuit, is still separated from, and for the most part still irrelevant to, practice (1903, CP1.600). But the goal of inquiry is no longer to apprehend eternal verities, but is instead the study of "self-controlled, or deliberate conduct" (1903, CP1.191). Whereas previously, Peirce held that moral conduct ought not be responsive to individual reasoning, now critical self-control has become a necessary part of ethics. As we perform actions in the world, we assess our conduct, and through self-control, amend it. The central features of self-control are "review, critical comparison with previous decisions or with ideals, rehearsal in the imagination of future conduct on various possible occasions, and the formation or modification thereby of habits or dispositions of the occult something behind consciousness".[30]

Peirce offers us an example of moral self-control. He considers an instance in which he wishes to act towards a person in a certain way in an upcoming meeting:

> [L]et us suppose a case. In the course of my reflexions, I am led to think that it would be well for me to talk to a certain person in a certain way. I resolve that I will do so when we meet. But considering how, in the heat of conversation, I might be led to take a different tone, I proceed to impress the resolution upon my soul; with the result that when the interview takes place, although my thoughts are then occupied with the matter of the talk, and may never revert to my resolution, nevertheless the determination of my being does influence my conduct (1903, CP1.594).

James also seems to hold something like the view that logical reasoning is rooted in ethics, though less technically than Peirce, in that he views truth to be a species of good (1907, P: 42).

[29] As Kent puts it, ethics studies "the general conditions required to make a deliberately adopted aim existent" (1987: 165). In general, Kent (1987) offers the best existing study of how Peirce's hierarchy is formed, defended and utilised.

[30] Undated Microfilm 939: 4-5, quoted in Holmes 1966: 117.

Here self-control consists in setting up a resolution for an upcoming action, and through imagination and determination, internalising it. Peirce tells us that this "resolution is of the nature of a plan; or, as one might almost say, a *diagram*" (1903, CP1.592). Through such imaginative practice and reflection, we can make our behaviour better conform to ideals which we hold.

After the meeting, Peirce reviews his actions:

> [A]s soon as it is over I begin to review it more carefully and I then ask myself whether my conduct accorded with my resolution. That resolution, as we agreed, was a mental formula. The memory of my action may be roughly described as an image. I contemplate that image and put the question to myself. Shall I say that that image satisfies the stipulations of my resolution, or not? The answer to this question, like the answer to any inward question, is necessarily of the nature of a mental formula (1903, CP1.596).

So, after some instance of conduct, we review our actions and assess whether or not they adequately accorded to our original plan. We can continue to perform this kind of reflective operation to see whether our conduct coheres with our general intentions, whether our intentions cohere with our ideals of conduct, or whether our ideals of conduct cohere with our more general ideals (1903, CP1.597-9). So, we have various, increasingly general, standards by which we can assess our actions. Our most general ideals are, in the main, the sentiments that we have inherited from our community. In education, our behaviour is brought into accordance with these communal ideals "by a continuous process of growth" rather than "by any distinct acts of thought" (1903, CP1.592). Subsequently, in maturity, we control our own behaviour to bring them into accord with these ideals.

There are two things to notice about Peirce's report of his interview. The first is that, though in the concrete example he offers us there are two individuals interacting with one another, this fact is irrelevant to the subsequent moral assessment. There is no room for the other person's reaction, their feelings or mood, or their criticisms or considerations, to influence the conduct that has been previously decided upon. In fact, Peirce's stated aim in internalising a resolution is explicitly to *prevent* the actual interaction with another person from altering his conduct. The ensuing self-review considers only how his own conduct measures up to a previous plan, and to general ideals.

The second thing to notice is that Peirce has external experience available in this example, in the figure of the other individual and their interaction, but Peirce ignores it in favour of internal experience. His sole concern is that his ideals are consistent, in

themselves and with each other (1903, CP1.591). And Peirce is clear that this picture covers *all* the important features of moral action:

> we have here all of the basic elements of moral conduct, the general standard mentally conceived beforehand, the efficient agency in the inward nature, the act, [and] the subsequent comparison of the act with the standard (1903, CP1.607).

The picture of self-control which Peirce offers rejects the experience of other people as relevant to assessing and controlling our behaviour.

We can see this again in Peirce's consideration of what ends we ought to pursue. The best ends are "ultimate", by which Peirce means capable of being "adopted and consistently pursued" (1903, CP5.133). Being righteous is *solely* a matter controlling our behaviour so that it accords with ends we are "prepared to deliberately adopt as ultimate" (1903, CP5.130). According to Peirce,

> any aim whatever which can be consistently pursued becomes, as soon as it is unfalteringly adopted, beyond all possible criticism, except the quite impertinent criticism of outsiders. An aim which cannot be adopted and consistently pursued is a bad aim. It cannot properly be called an ultimate aim at all. The only moral evil is not to have an ultimate aim (1903, CP5.133).

As such, having an aim or end which is consistent with itself, and with other general ideals which we hold, puts it beyond all criticism. This is to say that once all internal experience is satisfied, there is no further experience to which we need to respond.

Though Peirce's mature position differs considerably from that presented in his 1898 Harvard lectures, the difference is not significant for the purposes of this chapter. Though Peirce does provide more of a role for individuals to reflect on their own conduct, the reflection he takes to be legitimate is removed from any experience of an external world, or the interactions with other individuals within it. In this picture, the self-controlling agent seems almost purposefully blind to the experiences, perceptions, and opinions of others. The formation and assessment of our ends and ideals have nothing to do with any personal or inter-personal experience, but only with general concerns about consistency and adherence to community norms. As such, there is still no role provided to ethical secondness, either in the sense of other-direct actions being morally relevant, or in the sense of individuals and their interactions being an important element of moral inquiry. This view would still entail dogmatism and intractable moral

conflict, unless Peirce can provide an account of why appealing to the mere constancy of an ideal can provide a cure for these practical problems.[31]

§5. CONCRETE REASONABLENESS

Peirce holds that moral righteousness consists in adopting and acting under an ultimate end. Strictly speaking it is aesthetics, as the study of what it is possible to admire unconditionally, which provides us with an account of ultimate ends. According to Peirce the most ultimate end is what he calls "concrete reasonableness" (1903, CP1.615). It is the aim of this section to show that dedication to this end involves the denial of moral importance to the personal and inter-personal features of human lives.

Considering the types of ends which it is possible to adopt, Peirce delineates three broad classes of end. Once again, these emerge from the application of the categories. The three species of motivation are: the "subjective feelings of the individual" (firstness); motivation towards "objective purposes in society" (secondness), and the most general aim which is "the rationalization of the universe" (thirdness) (1903, CP1.590).[32] Peirce rejects the first two types of motivation. Motivations directed at pleasure or self-satisfaction are self-defeating, and "will be pronounced by every experienced person to be inevitably destined to miss the satisfactions at which they aim" (1900, CP8.140). And taking objective purposes in society as our end relies on some ulterior reason for why the furtherance of that society is desirable (ibid). So, neither type of end can be

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[31] Klein (2013) makes what might be seen as an additional point about Peirce's rejection of "ethical secondness". His paper concerns the *extent* of the community which is considered relevant in philosophical inquiry. Both Peirce and James hold that philosophical inquiry proceeds through a community of inquirers interacting and challenging one another. The opinion which emerges from such an inquiry, and which is immune to doubt, will be the truth (I.5). Klein's point is that James's picture of the relevant community of inquiry is much larger that Peirce's. Whereas Peirce reserves philosophical inquiry to an elite of people capable of understanding highly technical vocabulary and methodology, James thinks the philosophical community includes the "seriously inquiring amateur" (1907, P: 22). Increasing the breadth of the community increases the temperaments and perspectives applied to particular propositions, and so increases the objectivity of any propositions which do obtain consensus within this community (Klein, 2013: 420). As we shall see, James's idea of the relevant community for *moral* inquiry is even larger (VI.1.4). On Klein's view, then, rejecting ethical secondness (in the sense of rejecting the actual interactions and experiences of moral agents as relevant to moral inquiry) results in a *less objective* version of moral inquiry.
[32] See Stuhr (1994: 7) and Feibleman (1943: 99) for a more detailed analysis of these options.

considered ultimate, because they either rest on some other end, or they cannot be adopted and consistently pursued.

Peirce concludes that the only type of end which can be considered ultimate is the most general end:

> The only desirable object which is quite satisfactory in itself without any ulterior reason for desiring it, is the reasonable itself. I do not mean to put this forward as a demonstration; because, like all demonstrations about such matters, it would be a mere quibble, a sheaf of fallacies. I maintain that it is an experiential truth (1900, CP8.140).

The refusal to rationally defend that the reasonable itself is the only desirable end is consistent with Peirce's earlier concerns about the limitations of individual reasoning in matters of vital importance. However, he thinks that phenomenology, and the findings of aesthetics, will confirm this conclusion. According to Peirce, no end could be found more satisfying than the pursuit of reasonableness for reasonableness's sake (1903, CP1.615).

Moral ends are meant to be ultimate, which here means capable of being "pursued under all possible circumstances" and "in an indefinitely prolonged course of action" (1903, CP5.124-5). Only the reasonable itself is ultimate in this sense. Reason consists of the governance of the individual under the general, which is appropriate in every context. And seeing as generals, *qua* generals, cannot be exhausted in their individual actualisations, reason's work is never done, and so reason must "always be in a state of incipiency, of growth" (1903, CP1.615). As such, reason is unconditionally admirable, applicable in every situation, and capable of being pursued indefinitely. "Concrete reasonableness" is the application of this idea of the practical lives of individuals. This means that it is an individual's ethical duty to encourage and further the "rationalization of universe" (1903, CP1.590), and to "actualize ideas of [an] immortal, ceaselessly prolific kind" (c.1905, CP2.763). According to Peirce:

> the pragmaticist does not make the summum bonum to consist in action, but makes it to consist in that process of evolution whereby the existent comes more and more to embody those generals which were just now said to be destined, which is what we strive to express in calling them reasonable (1903, CP5.433).[33]

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[33] This is clearly connected with Peirce's cosmological picture. Peirce's application of the categories to metaphysics produced a picture of the universe moving from away from chaos and towards an "infinitely distant future when there will be no indeterminacy or chance by a complete reign of law" (1887-1888, W6: 208; see 1891, 6.33). It is mankind's duty to encourage this evolution towards order.

Simply put, acting under the ideal of concrete reasonableness means that we take on conduct designed to make the world a more reasonable place whenever it is "up to us" to do so (1903, CP1.615).

A concrete example in Peirce's philosophy of an individual who is motivated by concrete reasonableness is the figure of the scientist. A true scientist is not motivated by their own subjective interests, by the interests of a particular group or community, or even by the survival of their own species (1900, CP8.141). According to Peirce, the scientific inquirer is motivated solely by the most general of ends: truth for truth's sake. The individual scientist, though their discoveries might be small,

> hopes that by conscientiously pursuing the method of science he may erect a foundation upon which his successors may climb higher. This, for him, is what makes life worth living, and what makes the human race worth perpetuation. The very being of law, general truth, reason – call it what you will - consists in its expressing itself in a cosmos and in intellects which reflect it (1900, CP8.136).

Being motivated by concrete reasonableness means seeing the purpose of human life as the actualisation of reason. The scientist is not interested in the objective world as anything other than a "vehicle of eternal truth" (1898, CP5.589). In an odd reversal of the gap he previously expressed between theory and practice, Peirce's notion of concrete reasonableness holds that the best practical life is the one which is most analogous to that of the theoretical inquirer. This inquirer is disinterested in the actual world except insofar as it enables the discovery and actualisation of general truths.[34]

Concrete reasonableness as the sole moral end of human conduct amounts to a rejection of ethical secondness. It amounts to the view that our ethical duty is to perpetuate general reason (thirdness) in the universe. Any end which is not the pursuit of reason is rejected as insufficiently ultimate, and thus immoral. Such a position entails at least two serious problems which are of relevance to the thesis.

Firstly, such a position involves the rejection of individuals as morally important. We are interested in our own conduct, and the conduct of others, only insofar as it contributes (or hinders) the growth of concrete reasonableness. Any action directed towards the good a particular individual or group would be rejected by Peirce as not an ultimate end. If I adopt as my end helping a person who is in need, visiting a sick relative, or helping my neighbour better themselves, then my end is insufficiently ultimate. Such

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[34] Later I shall suggest that James also suggests that the model of a virtuous moral agent and the model of a virtuous inquirer are identical, though in a different way from Peirce (VI.3.9).

actions do not further the growth of reason in the world, and are thus of no moral importance.[35]

A more charitable reading of Peirce's position might argue that such other-directed ends can be re-described in terms of concrete reasonableness. Making the world a kinder, more stable, or more loving place might be one way of making it more reasonable. However, even on this modest reading, the good of another individual cannot ever be seen as a moral end in itself. The ethical importance of our action is not rooted in the good of the individual, but in the way our action contributes to the actualisation of general ideals. Merely as other persons who we might care about, individuals have no importance on Peirce's system.

A second problem concerns the role of individual difference. Peirce's position appears to entail that we should act so as to make the world a more ordered, predicable, and habitual place. This means that it is our *ethical* duty (rather than, say, our epistemic duty) to act so as to subsume novelty, spontaneity, and difference to a more general picture. Concrete reasonableness as a regulative ideal tells us to make the world as perfectly ordered as possible.[36] On Peirce's account the value of those parts of our lives, and those

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[35] In fact, considering that Peirce defines evil as having a non-ultimate aim, such other-directed actions might even be classified as evil. See 1903, CP5.133.

[36] Peirce sometimes presents the end of this process of the rationalization of the universe as a static order, an "absolutely perfect, rational and symmetrical system" in which law reigns and chance is removed (1891, CP6.33). Some Peirceans, however, emphasise the dynamism of Peirce's account. According to Hausman, Peircean generals should be seen as evolving tendencies which never reach stasis:

> [i]f would-be's are possibilities, or ideals not exhausted by their instances, then inquiry does not terminate in some perfected state of knowledge - knowledge about itself – that ceases to change. Reality is dynamic (Hausman 1993: 165)

However, there are two different ideas which arise when we consider the dynamic nature of generals, and neither prevent Peirce's view from being static. There is an epistemological sense of dynamism, in which the end of inquiry is a regulative but unattainable ideal. Inquiry can never end in a "perfected state of knowledge" because all inquirers are fallible, and certainty is never reached, only approximated. The other sense of dynamism to which Peirce can appeal is metaphysical. Due to the nature of generals, no amount of actual instantiations will exhaust them. In neither sense do we have the idea that the *general itself* is anything other than a static notion. To have real dynamism on an evolutionary picture, novelty and chance must be a permanent part of the universe. This means that generals which hold absolutely at *t1*, might have to change at *t2* due to novel additions to the world. James's position, as we shall see, is that though we make progress in understanding, novel additions are consistently made to the world (see VI.3.3; VII.1). Peirce on the other hand, holds that the cosmos tends away from chance and towards order, and that it is our ethical duty to *encourage* this process.

parts of the universe, which are individual, particular, and novel are always subordinate to the value of the general.[37]

§6. SYNECHISM

It is in his work on "synechism" that Peirce most clearly expresses a role for other-directed ends. Synechism involves continuity with, and love for, our neighbours in a way that looks like ethical secondness. In fact, I shall argue, synechism involves the rejection of not only the importance, but the existence of, individuals.

Synechism is a metaphysical theory, but it is clear that Peirce held it to have ethical ramifications. Simply put, synechism is a tendency to regard "*everything* as continuous" in a way which includes "the whole domain of experience in every element of it" (c.1892, CP7.566). A modest version of synechism simply amounts to the acceptance of real continuity in the world. Peirce tells us that the synechist is unwilling to see the world as composed of discontinuous, atomistic and "unrelated chunks of being", seeing it instead as containing real continuity (c.1892, CP7.569). A stronger version of synechism claims that existing things are continuous with each other in the sense that they *merge* into one another (c.1897, CP1.164). Applying the strong synechistic thesis to persons, Peirce writes:

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[37] We can see an extreme instance of Peirce rejecting the importance of individuals in his reflections on the problem of evil. Peirce argues that despite the appearance of evil from our individual perspectives, from God's perspective the perfection of the world is constantly growing. As such, we should not bemoan that the universe is problematic for us or our loved ones, but should dedicate ourselves to the "law of growth" which it is our duty to fulfil:

> In that fight he will endeavour to perform just that duty laid upon him and no more. Though his desperate struggles should issue in the horrors of his rout, and he should see the innocents who are dearest to his heart exposed to torments, frenzy and despair, destined to be smirched with filth, and stunted in their intelligence, still he may hope that it be best for them, and will tell himself that in any case the secret design of God will be perfected through their agency; and even while still hot from the battle, will submit with adoration to His Holy will. He will not worry because the Universes were not constructed to suit the scheme of some silly scold (1908, CP6.479).

Peirce inherits this position on the problem of evil from Henry James Senior (Kent, 1987: 155ff). These are exactly the kinds of solutions to the problem of evil which James finds practically untenable because they reject the importance of individual, lived, practical experience. See Stern and Williams (forthcoming; 1909, PU: 60)

> Nor must any synechist say: "I am altogether myself, and not at all you."
> If you embrace synechism, you must abjure this metaphysics of
> wickedness. In the first place, your neighbors are, in a measure, yourself,
> and in far greater measure than [...] you would believe. Really, the
> selfhood you like to attribute to yourself is, for the most part, the vulgarist
> delusion of vanity (c.1892, CP7.571).

Here Peirce lays out two ethically salient features of synechism: continuity with our neighbours, and a denial of the individual self.[38]

Taking the latter point first, Peirce's consistent position is that the reality (and value) of an individual lies in their general, rather than their particular, features. The reality of a person, for Peirce, lies solely in the consistency of their general behaviours (1868, W2: 241), or their habits (c.1905, CP6.585). Frequently, the actual existence of the individual, separated from the general community, is denied. Peirce regards "a man's naive notion that he exists as being in the main a delusion and a vanity".[39] The individual is only a source of "ignorance and error", and apart from his general community, is "only a negation" (1868, W2: 242).

Peirce was unclear on the precise role that continuity with our neighbours played in ethics. Perhaps for this reason, synechism is rarely considered by modern scholars working on Peirce's ethics. One notable exception is a recent paper by Sami Pihlström (2012). Pihlström presents Peirce's claim as an essentially transcendental one:

> [i]f others were completely discontinuous with ourselves, it would be
> hard to see how we could be motivated to care about them at all
> (Pihlström, 2012: 252).[40]

The metaphysical view of synechism, then, is in some sense required for moral motivation.[41]

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[38] Peirce's affirmation of synechism, or real continuity, is connected with his rejection of nominalism. The deficiencies of nominalism logically require us to accept the reality of thirdness, and thus real continuity. This means that, as Hookway (2006) points out, Peirce sees the person who chooses their own interest over other people's as not only immoral but *irrational*. The logical man will see that he is continuous with his neighbour, and this forms the underpinning for the altruism necessary for logical and scientific thought (see Hookway 2006).

[39] Undated microfilm 693: 150-2; quoted in Holmes (1966: 125). Holmes argues that Peirce views the individual self as a kind of self-automating cybernetic machine (1966: 122ff). In this way, Peirce's theory of self-control is compatible with his denial of the self.

[40] Pihlström himself is ambivalent about the ethical usefulness of synechism.

[41] Redondo (2012) offers an account in which synechism is combined with our pursuit for concrete reasonableness:

> In the end, Peirce's account of the *summum bonum*, the disciplined development
> of habits towards a state of perfect knowledge and concrete reasonableness, is an
> ardent encouragement for real participation in a public, self-correcting pursuit

Exactly *how* metaphysical continuity is required for moral motivation is, again, unclear. It is in his 1893 paper on "Evolutionary Love" that Peirce most obviously utilises his theory of synechism in an ethical way. His aim in this paper is to contrast two versions of evolution which are applied to nature, economics, and politics. One, based on "greed", suggests that self-interest and "every individual's striving for himself" is what leads to social and economic progress. The other, based on "love", suggests that progress is made through "every individual merging his individuality in sympathy with his neighbours". Part of the project of this paper is to suggest an alternative to the nominalistic mechanism which drives the evolution of greed. The metaphysical view of synechism defended by Peirce sees progress as the growth of love, rather than the result of self-interested greed (1893, CP6.289-4). As such, taking synechism seriously allows us to engage with the morally relevant practice of "merging" with our neighbours in a way that nominalism disallows.

Though we might sympathise with Peirce's attack on the philosophy of self-interest, it is worth noticing that Peirce only offers us two choices. We can either pursue the philosophy of self-interest, or we can merge our individuality into a general collective. No room is given to a middle option, in which individual difference is maintained, and progress is made through cooperation and interaction rather than self-interest. This is a further instance of Peirce's suspicion of individual reason. The only way *not* to be self-interested is to waive our individuality completely in the service of something larger.

Moreover, there appears to be complications with the kind of moral motivation such a synechism would provide. Broadening the notion of self through synechism so that our neighbours are continuous with ourselves does not make moral action other-regarding in the appropriate sense. If it is required that I see my neighbour as continuous with myself before I am motivated to assist them, then it could be that moral action becomes a special type of self-interested action. It certainly seems to prevent me from acting for the benefit of my neighbour as an individual, separate from my own interests and identity. Further, there are attitudes which we can morally adopt towards myself which we cannot adopt towards others. If my laziness prevents *me* from actualising my interests, this might be unwise but it is (arguably) not immoral. If my laziness prevents

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of truth, in other words, a passionate desire to be a part of a universal commens – the common mind into which the minds of utterers and interpreters have to be fused – tending to a definite state of total information (Redondo 2012: 230).

This is a different position on the relation between synechism and ethics than Pihlström suggests. On this interpretation, synechism would not be a transcendental precondition for moral motivation, but a requirement for attaining the highest good. Redondo parses concrete reasonableness as a state of "total information", in which we are synechistically "fused" with our neighbours. This suggestion, while interesting, does not provide us with any ethical secondness. In fact, the suggestion seems to be that we need to overcome any difference or individuality in order to achieve the highest good.

you from actualising your interests, this seems like immoral conduct. If I sacrifice my interests for the sake of someone else, then this looks like a morally virtuous act. If I sacrifice *your* interests for the sake of someone else, this is likely to be at least morally contentious. These kinds of examples might suggest that acting towards others as if they are continuous with ourselves is not as morally desirable as it might at first seem. Finally, being morally motivated by the commonalities which unite yourself and another person might well mask ethically relevant features of the other person which are *not* reducible to commonalities.[42]

Whatever the exact connection between synechism and moral motivation, Peirce does appear to use synechism to suggest that we have moral reasons to act for the betterment of other individuals:

> This does not, of course, say, Do everything possible to gratify the egoistic impulses of others, but it says, Sacrifice your own perfection for the perfectionment of your neighbor. Nor must it for a moment be confounded with the Benthamite [...] motto, Act for the greatest good of the greatest number. Love is not directed to abstractions but to persons, not to persons we do not know, not to numbers of people, but to our own dear ones, our family and neighbors. "Our neighbor," we remember, is one whom we live near, not locally perhaps but in life and feeling (1893, CP6.288).

This is certainly as close as we have seen Peirce come to admitting the value of individuals and of other-directed actions. However, there is a looming problem. Peirce cannot consistently hold that we can or should act for the benefit of other individuals, because he has denied that individual selves exist (c.1892, CP7.571; 1868, W2: 242). As a result, the ethically relevant features of my neighbour cannot include their existence, the continuance of their particular life, their happiness or well-being, or the protection of the things and people they care about. These would be mere "egoistic impulses". The ethically relevant features must be the growth of certain generals, either the growth of continuity between myself and my neighbour, or the growth of certain general ideas and

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[42] Pihlström picks up on a similar point:

> [t]he question remains, however, whether otherness is recognized fully enough when the continuity between oneself and others is emphasized in a Peircean manner [...] [i]t might, more precisely, be suggested that we ought to respect the other precisely as an Other, as totally discontinuous and therefore irreducible to ourselves (Pihlström 2012: 252).

Though this concern does seem valid, we might wonder whether Pihlström doesn't carry the thought too far in the opposite direction. Why must the other be "totally discontinuous", as Pihlström puts it? We can note that the Peircean position does not treat "otherness" with respect, without needing to eradicate *all* continuity between moral agents.

habits *in* my neighbour. Supporting my neighbour's instantiation of general ideals is my way of contributing to concrete reasonableness. This is what Peirce means by acting for the "perfectionment" of my neighbour, rather than for my neighbour's best interest or for their good. It is, of course, possible that acting to bring about concrete reasonableness in this instance will also benefit my neighbour in their individuality, but this would not be what grounds the rightness of the action. Though moral agents might be required to act within particular instances to bring about concrete reasonableness, the particularity or the individuality of those instances have no moral importance.

So rather than Peirce providing an account of ethical secondness in his synechism, in fact Peirce denies not just other-directed ends but also the existence and ethical importance of selves. As such, he actually also rejects ethical firstness.

§7. CONTEMPORARY PEIRCEANS

Going through Peirce's ethics, we can pick out a number of consistently held positions. First, the thought that theoretical ethics should be insulated from the particular problems, issues, or interests of actual persons or groups. Ethical truth, like the truth of any science, should be pursued for its own sake. Second, the thought that our practical lives should be governed by ideals set by the experience of the community. No individual reasoning, or disagreement from external perspectives, should be allowed to alter these ideals. Third, we've seen that the kind of experience which is relevant to ethical inquiry is internal, rather than available external experience which comes from the discussions, interactions, perspectives, problems, and criticisms of actual moral agents. Finally, Peirce holds the only type of end which has ethical importance is a general end, and individuals considered apart from general ends have no importance.

I suggested (§2) that we could look at the broad category of ethical secondness in two ways. The first regarded the kinds of ends which are considered to have ethical importance, with secondness referring to other-directed ends, or ends directed towards the good of particular individuals. In both his early and his mature thought, Peirce rejects the importance of such ends. Instead, we are told that the only moral end is a general end. This lead us to odd conclusions. According to Peirce, we have a moral duty to make the world more rational, rather than a duty to help other persons. Insofar as other selves are important, it is their general features which are relevant, such as their continuity with us, or their instantiation of general ideals. This prevents Peirce from placing any importance on individual diversity or difference. In his early work, Peirce rejected any role for individual reason, or dialogue between actual individuals, in the

formation and assessment of our moral ideals. In his later work, he allowed individuals to use reason to make sure their conduct accorded with the general ideals accepted by their community, but deliberately insulated such reflection from external criticism. Taken seriously, such a position would at best lead to indifference and at worst intolerance between differing individuals, communities, and cultures.

The second way we can look at ethical secondness concerns what kinds of experiences are relevant to ethical inquiry. Throughout, we have seen Peirce deny that the actual practices of individuals, the particular problems they face, the experiences which they have, or the criticisms from other individuals with differing perspectives, have *any* relevance to our pursuit of ethical knowledge. These features would seem to provide available and relevant external experiences which could play an important role in ethical inquiry. Peirce, however, makes clear that only internal experience, akin to mathematical or diagrammatic experience, is relevant to ethical inquiry. It seems odd for any supposed science to routinely ignore direct evidence provided by the practice being theorised about. But the position Peirce adopts is in part due to what he thinks ethics is inquiring into. For Peirce, ethics is only tangentially about overcoming actual problems in the world. As the pursuit of an ultimate and ideal good, pursued for its own sake, the practices and experiences of actual individuals are irrelevant to ethical inquiry.

Though it *is* in tension with his general view that none of the three categories should be ignored in any area of inquiry, Peirce's ethical position is not inconsistent. But his rejection of ethical secondness does amount to a rejection of many theses commonly held by pragmatists in general, and contemporary Peirceans in particular. The dilemma which the contemporary Peircean faces, then, is whether to bite the bullet, and accept the non-pragmatist entailments which follow from Peirce's work on ethics, or to accept ethical secondness by rejecting a large portion of Peirce's actual work, and so making it unclear in what sense the resulting ethics is "Peircean" at all.

One contemporary Peircean who accepts the first horn of this dilemma is Mayorga (2012). According to Mayorga, any ethics which focused on individuals and their interactions in any way would be nominalistic, and therefore by Peirce's lights, flawed (Mayorga 2012: 105). Though Mayorga may well be correct in her assessment of why Peirce eschewed even modest individualism, this results from a very odd conception of nominalism, even by Peirce's own lights. The problem with nominalism, according to Peirce, is that it rejects one of the three categories (thirdness), not that it *accepts* secondness. An ethical theory is not nominalistic because it gives a role to ethical secondness, but only if it rejects ethical thirdness.

Mayorga reaffirms the gap between theory and practice by distinguishing between "pure" ethics, an inquiry conducted by philosophers, which aims to discover the "true aim and purpose of humankind", and "plain" ethics, which governs everyday

interactions and is best left to the ethical sentiments (Mayorga 2012: 123). The only concession Mayorga makes to ethical secondness is that

> ethical evaluation takes place within a specific human perspective; ethical standards are informed by specific features of human life. Just as truth is linked with the final opinion of a community of inquirers, ethics is linked with the human condition [...] ethical realism asserts that given enough time and reflection, values such as the dignity of persons would be universally discovered (Mayorga 2012: 123).

It is true that human inquirers require a community of inquiry to reach ethical truth. But there is no indication here that individual members of that community have any impact on that inquiry, that their interactions and experiences are important to that inquiry, or that we pursue ethical inquiry to solve the problems which emerge between actual people. There is, then, only the appearance of ethical secondness.

Most contemporary Peirceans adopt the second route, and accept ethical secondness whilst rejecting substantive portions of Peirce's actual position. De Waal, for instance, suggests that communication between actual individuals is less fallible than reliance on individual reason, and that ethical discussion is akin to scientific inquiry; that individuals should reason about our inherited moral norms and sentiments rather than holding them to be infallible; and that we should strive to empathise with different perspectives rather than taking a disinterested theoretical stance (de Waal 2012: 99). Bergman too believes that we can scrutinize our inherited ethical practices and habits, and rejects Peirce's claim that we should seek ethical truth for its own sake, denying even the intelligibly of Peirce's *summum bonum* (Bergman 2012: 143-4). Misak openly rejects most of Peirce's work on ethics, and instead applies his general epistemology to ethical matters (Misak 2000: 48; 2004b: 164). Misak holds that a pragmatist ethics should be interested in ethical practice, and that inquiry should in fact be directed at practical ends (Misak 2000: 51; 54; 127); that we should encourage challenges from external perspectives in testing our ethical ideals (Misak 1994b: 743; 2000: 28; 2004: 158); that it is not internal but external experience which the pragmatist ethicist ought to take account of (Misak 2000: 94); that first-personal experience can be relevant in ethical deliberation (Misak, 2008); and that the end of inquiry is not some general end, but emerges from local needs (Misak 2000: 49; 2004: 154).[43]

The resulting ethical views are recognisably pragmatist. They are fallibilistic without being sceptical, humanistic, and based on the practical problems, experiences, and interactions of actual persons. But as such a position requires the rejection of most of

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[43] Misak also, counter to Peirce's monistic conception of the good, holds that and that we should not only *expect* pluralism, but encourage it (Misak 1994a: 47; 1994b: 746; 2000: 95, 129-30; 144), though she does seem to renege on this claim later (Misak, 2005: 131).

Peirce's concrete statements about ethics it is unclear in what sense these positions can still be called Peircean at all.

§8. Conclusion

The pragmatism of William James is routinely criticised for its individualism. Allowing a role within inquiry to individual perspectives and experience appears to lead to a dangerous subjectivism. This chapter has argued that, in fact, *any* pragmatist ethics must provide at least some role for actual individuals and their interactions. It has done so by examining the pragmatist ethics of Charles Peirce, arguing that Peirce provides no role in his ethics for individuals or their interactions, and exploring the problems which emerge from that position. Even most contemporary Peirceans reject Peirce's actual position on ethics, and allow individuals some role in ethical inquiry. As such, an investigation into James's ethics, and how his pragmatism strives to connect realism and individualism, will be timely and useful to contemporary pragmatist ethics.

We shall see a number of the themes examined in this chapter returning in our interpretation of James's position. James also holds some form of common-sensism or sentimentalism; takes an empirical approach to ethical inquiry; is committed to synechism having some role in ethics; talks about the importance of love as opposed to self-interest; and takes the scientific inquirer as a model of a virtuous human being. However, he does so without compromising either his realism or his commitment to the importance of individuals and their interactions in moral inquiry. In the terminology of this chapter, we can say that James provides us with an account which accepts each of the three ethical categories as fundamental.

However, James does not only hold that individuals have an important role to play within moral inquiry, but also that individual *differences* do. Individuals' different temperaments, experiences, and particular contexts can lead to very different, but equally reasonable, opinions about the good. Even more than individualism, this kind of pluralism seems to preclude a Peircean-type realism. It is to this pluralism that we now turn.

CHAPTER III:

PRAGMATISM AND PLURALISM

§1. INTRODUCTION: THE CHALLENGE TO PLURALISM

Unlike Peirce, James was a pluralist, as were many of the pragmatists who followed him. Their pluralism is often connected with other virtues, such as democracy, tolerance, and diversity. Recently, Robert Talisse and Scott Aikin (henceforth T&A) have challenged these accounts by questioning whether this pluralism is even compatible with pragmatism. According to their analysis, pluralism involves the rejection of the idea that ethical inquiry could ever reach a stable conclusion, and consequently a rejection of Peircean realism.

If James's pluralism is to be consistent with the realist version of pragmatism defended in Chapter I, then a clear articulation of how that pluralism does not fall into the ills which T&A have identified is required. In this chapter, I will examine and defend William James's pluralism in the light of T&A's criticisms. T&A primarily present their position in two papers: "Why Pragmatists Cannot Be Pluralists" (2005a) and, more recently, "Pragmatism and Pluralism Revisited" (2016). The first section of the chapter will examine these two articles, pulling out the central claims of the first (§1.1) and the second paper (§1.2). In the second section, I will lay out the various ways in which James himself used the term "pluralism" throughout his work (§2). Though T&A are primarily concerned about *value* pluralism, James adopts and defends pluralism in almost every sphere of his philosophy, and I'll examine the defences of pluralism which James offers

in these spheres. Finally, I'll combine these analyses, and discuss what James's pluralism can say in response to T&A's challenges (§3).

§1.1 THE ORIGINAL CHALLENGE: TALISSE AND AIKIN (2005A)

According to T&A, pluralism emerges from the observation that there are apparently "incompatible, incompossible, and incommensurable" goods from which we have to choose. Pluralism adds to this observation that such incommensurability is *inevitable*, and offers one of two reasons for this incommensurability. Epistemic accounts hold that the persistence of moral disagreement is due to the complexity of our moral lives, and the insufficiency of our rationality. Ontological accounts of pluralism suggest that there is something about moral facts themselves which conflict. From this, the authors give us three types of pluralism: shallow pluralism, which emerges from the epistemic view, and is characterised by "the norm and procedure of tolerating difference"; deep pluralism, which emerges from the ontological view, and is characterised by "a kind of agonistic attitude towards all values, where there could be no moral reason to adopt any view over another"; and *modus vivendi* pluralism, which emerges from a more liberal response to the ontological view, where the creation of a "Hobbesian truce" between conflicting values is attempted (T&A, 2005a: 102-103).

The authors also define two types of pragmatism. "Meaning pragmatism", which finds its best articulation in James, sees pragmatism as a tool for settling or dissolving apparently irreconcilable disputes within philosophy by looking at practical effects. "Inquiry pragmatism", which finds its best articulation in Peirce, sees pragmatism as a method of inquiry characterised by "fallibilism, experimentalism, and holism". Inquiry pragmatism does not just want to dissolve conflict, like meaning pragmatism, but seeks a "positive resolution" through experimentation (T&A, 2005a: 105-7).

According to T&A, each form of pluralism is incompatible with both types of pragmatism. Let's take each combination in turn, starting with deep pluralism. Deep pluralism is incompatible with inquiry pragmatism, because the claim that values are *necessarily* incompatible is a block in the road of inquiry. The deep pluralist holds that the goods which are in conflict are seen to be "static and perfect", with no possibility of revision. This rejects experimentation and fallibilism, by simply asserting that a certain state of affairs is the case. Deep pluralism is also incompatible with meaning pragmatism, for two reasons. Firstly, meaning pragmatism holds that there is but "one criterion for meaning", that of sensible difference. In principle, every conflict is translatable into this common language of practical ramifications. Deep pluralism is not compatible with such a view. Secondly, as meaning pragmatism holds that all assertions

on the philosophical level must be translatable into practical consequences, deep pluralism cannot be accepted. The metaphysical claims of the deep pluralist can find no practical ramifications: "any account of the incomparability of values that explains that incomparability in terms of features beyond our practices of comparison" will be akin to "the useless verbiage of transubstantiation theories" (T&A, 2005a: 108-109).

There are four different claims here which can and should be separated. They are:

(i)   That (deep) pluralism is incompatible with (inquiry) pragmatism because the claim that values are necessarily incompatible blocks the road of inquiry.

(ii)   That (deep) pluralism is incompatible with (inquiry) pragmatism because it renders individual claims about the good to be infallible and static.

(iii) That (deep) pluralism is incompatible with (meaning) pragmatism because pragmatism cannot allow for inconsistency on the level of practical content.

(iv)   That (deep) pluralism is incompatible with (meaning) pragmatism because the metaphysical assertions of ontological pluralism have no practical consequences, and so are meaningless.

We will return to these claims in the third section, to analyse what answers James might be able to provide.

Shallow pluralism emerges from an epistemic account of pluralism. It is the view that competing visions of the good should be tolerated, seeing as moral conflicts cannot be decided on reasonable grounds. T&A hold that shallow pluralism and inquiry pragmatism fit well. Inquiry pragmatism can see competing goods and those who hold them as "alternative experimental programs and researchers" (T&A 2005a: 107). However, according to T&A, this means that shallow pluralism is not really pluralism at all. It does not see goods as irreconcilable, but as "procedural puzzles and occasions for inquiry". As shallow pluralists, we tolerate disagreement because we expect some criteria for adjudicating those disagreements to emerge. But this is position which is perfectly consistent with monism, and has in fact be held by avowed monists such as Plato and Descartes. Further, though pluralism might allow that different contexts can give rise to different perspectives on the world, "these different conceptions of the world are all *responses to the same world*" (T&A, 2005a: 111). It is only because of this unity that value conflicts can be seen as conflicts at all:

> If the forest for an environmental activist and the forest for a logger were not the same forest, then the two perspectives would not have the conflict they do. If they were two separate objects, then the loggers could turn

their trees into planks and sawdust, and the activists could hug theirs as much as they like (T&A, 2005a: 112).

For these reasons, shallow pluralism is not pluralism at all, but is in fact a disguised monism.

The two core claims here are the following:

(v) That (shallow) pluralism is compatible with (inquiry) pragmatism, but is not really pluralism, as the only properties it shares with other pluralisms can be accepted by monists.

(vi) That (shallow) pluralism is compatible with (inquiry) pragmatism, but is not really pluralism, as it requires that conflicting accounts of values are still responses to the same world, and thus a kind of monism.

Again, we will return to and assess these claims in the final section of this chapter.

Modus vivendi pluralism emerges out of a more liberal response to an ontological interpretation of pluralism. It comes in two forms: indifferentist *modus vivendi* pluralism, and recognitionist *modus vivendi* pluralism. Indifferentists suggest that, seeing as each claim of the good is as reasonable as any other, each should be simply kept out of the way of the others. Recognitionists suggest, for the same reason, that competing claims about the good should be able to recognise the other claims, and aim to create a world in which differing claims can accept the value of each other's existence. Accordingly, meaning pragmatism is consistent with recognitionist *modus vivendi* pluralism, as it aims to resolve apparently different philosophical conceptions into "co-habitational practices" (T&A, 2005a: 106).

According to T&A, there are serious practical problems with *modus vivendi* pluralism which should prevent any pragmatist from adopting it. Firstly, *modus vivendi* pluralism is inherently unstable. Any "Hobbsian truce" of the sort *modus vivendi* pluralists advocate will be less desirable to all involved than a state in which their own value system is given free reign. As such, as soon as any power imbalance between partisans occurs, the system "will quickly devolve into an […] war among the competing factions". We might try to stabilise this by an appeal to either recognitionist or indifferentist accounts. But though recognitionist *modus vivendi* pluralism is more stable, it is not really pluralism, seeing as it *"requires that the duties of recognition and reciprocity override the values driving the conflicts"*. Appealing to overarching notions such as "tolerance", "reciprocity" or "cross partisan recognition" as having trumping power over the conflicting values means we are no longer pluralists at all. Partisans of a particular good can do no such thing, as "those who espouse values in competition with the partisanship are invariably seen as morally *deficient, ignorant,* or immoral". For this reason, "[t]he

recognitionist version of *modus vivendi* pluralism is internally incoherent" (T&A, 2005a: 110; see T&A, 2011: 9). Indifferentist *modus vivendi* pluralism is also unstable, though for a different reason: it compels competing groups to be indifferent to one another, appealing to "extreme perspective[s]" in order to deflate *all* values, and make them unimportant. As T&A put it:

> [s]urely this price is too high … From the perspective of the universe as a whole, does it matter if I go to work, or feed my dog, or pay the rent, or even breathe? (T&A, 2005a: 110)

This indifferentist agenda will either make us detached from our own lives, or else be so unstable that it will lead us right back to positively asserting our own conflicting values.

There are three claims which can be drawn out of these points:

(vii) That (*modus vivendi*) pluralism is compatible with pragmatism but is pragmatically undesirable, because it is unstable and will lead to conflict in the long run.

(viii) That (recognitionist *modus vivendi*) pluralism is compatible with pragmatism, but is internally incoherent because it requires partisans to place more weight on overarching values of tolerance than on their own.

(ix) That (indifferentist *modus vivendi*) pluralism is compatible with pragmatism, but is pragmatically undesirable because it leads to people being indifferent about their own values.

We shall discuss all nine points in more detail in the final section (§3), but now I turn to the claims made in T&A's latest work on the topic.

§1.2 THE NEW CHALLENGE TO PLURALISM: TALISSE AND AIKIN (2016)

More recently, T&A have returned to their claims regarding pragmatism and pluralism. However, they now make the case that pragmatists *can* adopt a form of pluralism, which they call "modest epistemological pluralism". Modest epistemological pluralism, however, is not the kind of pluralism that pragmatists have traditionally tended to espouse.

Pluralism, as pragmatists usually understand it, is "not merely the *recognition* but also the *appreciation* of the diversity of goods". Often the pragmatists use the term pluralism as a kind of "shorthand for a family of admirable commitments: anti-dogmatism, open-mindedness, inclusiveness, and so on". Call this *popular pluralism*. T&A make the forceful

point that the concepts which popular pluralism involves are in fact ideal dependent. We can summarise their point as follows:

> *(x)*   That (popular) pluralism is not value-neutral. Concepts such as "tolerance" gain their content from a particular perspective of what counts as tolerable. Thus, (popular) pluralism is hollow.

Though we might claim tolerance, our particular value system is going to inform us of what is *tolerable*, and so we are still actually constrained by our partisan values (T&A, 2016: 18).

Seeing as pluralism is not value-neutral, the pluralist must offer a substantive account of the kinds of behaviours it allows for. We can summarise this meta-philosophical point in the following:

> *(xi)*   That pluralism must have some substantive content which the non-pluralist must deny.

If whatever concrete claims about tolerance and diversity that pluralism affirms can also be made by the monist, then pluralism has no distinctive practical effects (T&A, 2016: 19).

Once again, T&A separate metaphysical and epistemological pluralism, with epistemological pluralism being separated into two grades: strong and modest. Strong epistemological pluralism is a "form of skepticism concerning the rational resolvability of value conflict". Modest epistemological pluralism holds that we do not *currently* have the tools to resolve value conflict. Metaphysical pluralism seems identical to ontological pluralism, as it is the view that there are values which are incommensurable due to facts about their nature. Due to pragmatism's naturalism, T&A take it that the pragmatist "obviously must reject metaphysical pluralism" (T&A, 2016: 20-21).[1]

Unfortunately, James is held to be a prime example of a metaphysical pluralist. According to T&A, James holds that "good is the satisfaction of desire" whilst also denying "the homogeneity of desires" (T&A, 2016: 20).[2] James wants to claim that increasing the number of goods satisfied would make for a better world. But, according to T&A, he lacks the basis for this claim precisely because he has rejected any commonality between claims of the good:

> The central premise of James's pluralism is that desires are heterogeneous states with no common character; thus, the satisfaction of a greater number of desires does not cause there to be a greater *quantity* of good,

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[1] As we have seen, however, neither Peirce nor James think that pragmatism entails the rejection of metaphysical inquiry (I.4).

[2] I will later reject the desire-based interpretation of James's ethics (V.1.2; 2).

> only more *goods*. More good in the world is surely better than less good, but what is the value of there being *more goods*? (T&A, 2016: 21).

This gives us another point against the metaphysical pluralist, this time specifically targeted at James:

> *(xii)* That the (metaphysical) pluralist cannot assert that a world in which two different goods are satisfied is better than one in which only one is satisfied.

Without a commonality between the different goods (which would in effect be a monism), the pluralist cannot assert that a world with more good*s* in it is better than a world with less.

Strong epistemological pluralism is ruled out by T&A, again on the grounds that the assertion that we will *never* have the grounds to adjudicate between certain disagreements blocks the road of inquiry. This leaves modest epistemological pluralism. The modest epistemological pluralist's claim is that "our moral knowledge is underdeveloped, and that this calls for further inquiry, even with respect to cases that seem intractable". But this form of pluralism is very limited, as it must remain "quietist" about the ontology of value, and about the outcome of moral inquiry (T&A, 2016: 22). We can summarise this point in the following claim:

> *(xiii)* That (modest epistemological) pluralism is quietist about the ontology of value.

Modest epistemological pluralism remains open to "the possibility that inquiry could lead us to adopt a more robust form of pluralism, or even a version of monism" (T&A, 2016: 22).

In this more recent paper, T&A also consider the connection assumed by the majority of pragmatists between pluralism and the "attractive social norms" of tolerance, open-mindedness, inclusion, and diversity. According to T&A, reading these norms straight off from pluralism itself is a mistake:

> One cannot derive a conclusion about what is valuable from a thesis about what values are. Any attempt to forge the entailment will commit an is/ought error (T&A, 2016: 22).

The best that pluralism can do is provide a basis for the adoption of such norms. Modest epistemological pluralism does just this, in that it encourages a kind of "epistemic humility" which is the "natural cognitive counterpart" of such norms. As epistemically humble, we see the sharing of information, the correction of beliefs through dialogue, and allowing others the freedom to "conduct their experiments in living", to be sound policies for making moral progress (T&A, 2016: 23). In this sense:

> [e]*pistemic humility* and a companion that we might call *earnestness* – the desire to believe the truth and follow the best reasons – dovetail with the norms of tolerance, diversity, and dialogue (T&A, 2016: 23).

But, importantly, *pluralism* is not the feature that does the work in supporting these attractive norms, but rather the *modest epistemic* component is (ibid). Metaphysical pluralism is even worse off, in that it does not motivate toleration at all, and, in fact, can lead us to authoritarianism just as easily as to toleration. Let's summarise these points in our final claim:

> *(xiv)*   That modest epistemological pluralism is supportive of attractive social norms, but does not entail them, and that there is no connection between metaphysical pluralism and attractive social norms.

So, interestingly, in their more recent paper T&A have set out to provide an answer to the question they posed in their first: what sort of pluralists can pragmatists be? Their answer is a kind of pragmatist who a quietist about the nature of value, and considers pluralism to be a result of epistemological humility. I now turn to assessing William James's account of pluralism, before working through the issues raised by T&A in light of it.

§2. JAMES'S MONISTIC PLURALISM

James calls himself a pluralist in almost every sphere: meta-philosophical; metaphysical; epistemological; and ethical. Though my primary interest in the thesis will be defining James's ethical pluralism, here I'd like to go through each in turn, to look at the shape and nature of this pluralism in each of these spheres. It will be my contention that in each, James has a similar structure to his pluralism: he advocates a contentful pluralism, but underpins it with a "neutral" or "formal" monism. I will call this structure "monistic pluralism". This is perhaps clearest in his metaphysics, but, once noticed, the pattern is very evident in each of the four areas.[3] I look first at his meta-philosophical pluralism

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[3] When exploring James's metaphysical thesis of pure experience, Lamberth asserts that it is "*formally* monistic" whilst leaving room for "extreme variation in content or nature for the various experiences" (Lamberth, 1999: 25). It is my contention that we can find a similar structure at every level of James's philosophy. See also Slater (2011) for an exploration into the similarities and differences of James's metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, and religious pluralisms.

(§2.1); and then look in turn at his metaphysical (§2.2); epistemological (§2.3), and axiological (§2.4) forms of pluralisms.

§2.1 META-PHILOSOPHICAL PLURALISM

James's theory of temperaments is often quoted, but rarely read accurately. James suggests that our various philosophical theories are driven by our personal temperaments more than we tend to admit. These temperaments shape what kind of account of the world we find rational. The relevant temperaments are often presented by James as being necessarily opposed: rationalistic and empiricist temperaments, or temperaments which support monistic and pluralistic world-views, for instance. In *Pragmatism*, James collects these various temperamental traits into two broad types, which he calls "tender-minded" and "tough-minded", but which he admits are for the most part not literally true accounts of people's mental make-up. Most people (read: non-philosophers) have temperaments which do not fall into one or the other extreme, and desire a reasonable middle ground on most points (1907, P: 12-14).

The appeal to differing temperaments is meant to explain in part why many philosophical debates seem intractable. Philosophers are temperamentally drawn to find certain accounts more satisfying than others. When they attempt to back up these philosophical accounts with impersonal reasons, they can be less convincing to those who do not already share a temperamental disposition to find such accounts plausible. Pragmatism is meant to break such deadlocks by "interpret[ing] each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences" (1907, P: 28). This offers people with different philosophical visions a common language with which to compare, combine, and criticise each other. It prevents intractable conflict, without placing constraints on the content of individual philosophical projects. It is in this sense that pragmatism can be seen as a kind of monism, a single methodology which allows us to clarify exactly what is at stake between apparently very different philosophies.

We can see a similar approach in James's exploration of what makes any given vision of the world "rational" (1882, WB: 57). According to James, the aim of philosophy is to present a rational account of the world. The problem is that "rationality" is a complex notion. It breaks down into at least two (and perhaps as many as four) components, including intellectual rationality and practical rationality. Rationalistic philosophers often find visions which privilege the intellectual aspects more satisfying, and are less moved or sensitive to the practical aspects of experience. Empirical philosophers find the opposite to be the case. According to James, "what makes us monists or pluralists,

determinists or indeterminists, is at bottom always some sentiment like this" (1884, WB: 119).

Again, though, this is not meant to make philosophies *necessarily* or *permanently* divided. James has indicated a common aim amongst philosophers, and diagnosed a problem with achieving it. The solution is to aim for a *balance* of the different aspects of rationality (e.g. 1879, EPh*: 42; 1909, PU: 55*). The balance is achieved, not in the experience of any one individual, but in the experience of the human-race as a whole, in which temperamental differences and extremes are evened out. On this view, the very different tendencies and sentiments at work in our separate philosophies are unified in a common philosophical project of attempting to find the world a rational place.[4]

§2.2 METAPHYSICAL PLURALISM

James presents his own "radical empiricism" as a pluralistic account of metaphysics, to be contrasted with, in particular, the monistic idealism then dominant in academic philosophy. In the introduction to *The Will to Believe,* he defines radical empiricism as the "hypothesis" that pluralism "is the permanent form of the world". It is an "empiricism" because it is "contented to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience". And it is "radical", precisely because "it treats the doctrine of monism itself as an hypothesis, and […] does not dogmatically affirm monism as something with which all experience has got to square" (1897, WB: 5-6). It is "pluralistic" not because it dogmatically asserts that certain conflicts are permanent, but because it holds that no one conception or perspective will ever be sufficient to encompass the complexity of the universe of experience. "Something always escapes" even our best attempts to provide monistic accounts of the universe (1909, PU: 145).

The first thing to notice is that James holds his metaphysical pluralism as an hypothesis which is "coordinate" with monism. Indeed, *A Pluralistic Universe* is in large part the application of his own pragmatist methodology to the two hypotheses, in the attempt to show pluralism to be the more plausible (1909, PU: 148). According to James, our daily experience already points towards the pluralistic hypothesis. We do not find the world completely unified, but rather unified in some respects and dis-unified in others. Temperamental differences incline us to focus on different aspects of this common experience. Monism tends to privilege those aspects which are continuous, traditional

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[4] I will return to a more detailed discussion of what makes a philosophy "rational" in the final chapter (VII.1).

empiricism those aspects which are discontinuous, but pluralistic empiricism aims to be "fair to both the unity and the disconnexion", finding "no reason for treating either as illusory" (1904, ERE: 24; IV.1).

The second thing to notice is that James's pluralism stems not just from the recognition that there are opposing perspectives on reality, but also from the essential indeterminacy of reality. As James puts it in his notes for the "General Problems of Philosophy" syllabus (1906-1907):

> Issues seem open and uncertain, futures ambiguous and indeterminate. Now it *may be* that this appearance corresponds to reality, and that to some degree and in some respects the world is still in the making, still really growing, still to be lost or saved, according as the forces active in it work well or badly […] We have here the hypothesis of a world not wholly determined beforehand, but determined by what its parts may do from moment to moment with their own possibilities, a world therefore of which the total outcome is not predestinate (1906-1907, ML: 397).

In this sense, the universe is "wild" (1897, WB: 6; 1909, PU: 55). There *are* "actual forces at work which tend, as time goes on, to make the unity greater", and our own inquiries and strivings are among them (1904, ERE: 24). But, if the pluralistic hypothesis is correct, then there are also forces of novelty and chance which will prevent us from ever achieving complete unity (1904, ERE: 42-44; 1907, P: 124). These forces too include our own creativity, intelligence, and activity (VII.1). Our inquiries, then, are not purposeless. We should expect an increase in understanding and unity in particular areas. But we should not expect, according to pluralism, nor aim for, this unity to be total.

In many ways, the question as to whether or not we ought to be monists or pluralists is a flawed one, from James's perspective. The question ought to be: *on what levels*, and *in what senses*, is the world monistic or pluralistic, and what practical effects will this entail? This is a question James deals with in depth in his *Pragmatism* (1907), and in his notes for the unfinished book *The Many and the One* (1903-4). In these works, James delineates eight different levels or dimensions on which we can be either pluralists or monists, which I shall look at briefly here.

The first, and most abstract dimension, is that of treating the world as one subject of discourse. Can we treat the world as "one" in the sense of referring to it, and predicating properties of it, as a whole? James holds that we can, but that we should not draw any deeper metaphysical conclusions from this fact. After all, we can refer to "a chaos" in a similar sense, without rendering it thereby monistic in any deeper sense (1907, P: 66). A

monistic stance is required at this abstract level for us to talk about, exist in, and inquire into the world.[5]

The second dimension concerns universal continuity. The question here is whether there are features of the world which appear to "hang together" universally:

> Can you pass from one to another, keeping always in your one universe without any danger of falling out? In other words, do the parts of your universe *hang together*, instead of being like detached grains of sand? (1907, P: 66).

Again, James is a monist at this level. Space and time seem to unify every aspect of our experiential world. And this is a good thing, too. If space weren't universally continuous, we'd have a hard time walking from one place to another. These two dimensions, at least, suggest that there is a universal world of experience and discourse, regardless of the subsequent discontinuities within it.[6]

Other types of continuity which we experience are less universal. Gravity and heat conduction are nearly universal in the physical world. Light and chemical forces are other types of continuity which are less universal.[7] In less universal cases, the world is continuous in a more piecemeal or "concatenated" way.[8] Systems of knowledge are systems with this limited type of continuity, and human inquiry is active in making the continuity of these cognitive systems grow.

The result of this picture is:

> innumerable little hangings-together of the worlds' parts within the larger hangings together, little worlds, not only of discourse but of operation, within a wider universe. Each system exemplified one type or grade of union, its parts being strung on that peculiar kind of relation, and the same part may figure in many different systems, as a man may hold several offices and belong to various clubs (1907, P: 67).

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[5] In this sense, James tells us that "Of *course* the world is one, we say. How else could it be a world at all? Empiricists as a rule, are as stout monists of this abstract kind as rationalists are" (1907, P: 65).

[6] See VI.3.2 for some of the problems which understanding space under the radical empirical hypothesis entails, and see I.6.1 for James's realism about these sorts of general laws.

[7] As James puts it:

> [O]paque and inert bodies interrupt the continuity here, so that you have to step round them, or change your mode of progress if you wish to get further on that day (1907, P: 67)

Imperfect continuity is here indicated by practical marks, of being unable to continue following some practice or chain of thought.

[8] This concatenated unity will be explored further in the next chapter (IV.1.3).

The world is unified by continuous connections, ranging from universal to imperfect systems of connection. But it is also *dis*-unified, in the sense that no one system of knowledge or action encompasses every other feature of reality. Moreover, the same portion of reality can be included in two or more different systems of knowledge, and provide different roles within them. "The great point to notice", James tells us, is "that the oneness and the manyness are absolutely co-ordinate here. Neither is primordial or more essential or excellent than the other" (1907, P: 68). The universe does not by itself dictate whether unity or dis-unity is primary. It is our own practical interests and aesthetic requirements which adjudicate which aspect we pay attention to in a given situation.

Another way in which the world can be unified is through causal connection. The ways in which the universe is or is not a causal unity is a matter of empirical investigation. A monistic account of causal continuity must see the world as *one* mechanical or causal system, in which every part is connected to every other. This necessitates that it is impossible to "move any part without moving the whole" (1903-4, MEN: 14). The pluralistic account sees different causal systems as being in some senses insulated from one another, holding that:

> the physical world seems to fall into distinct systems of bodies which may act on one another only as totals, whilst within each system changes may occur that fail to modify the systems outside (1903-4, MEN: 14).

James suggests that pluralism is more plausible (and desirable) than universal determinism.[9]

Another level on which we might be pluralists or monists concerns whether the universe demonstrates *generic* unity. According to James, though it is obvious that the universe contains real generic kinds, it is equally clear that we have not as yet (contra the Absolute idealist) found a "*summum genus*", under which everything could be subsumed (1903-4, MEN: 13; 1907, P: 69). Again, the universe seems to demonstrate imperfect unity in this regard, and so confirms the pluralistic hypothesis.

James goes on to treat teleological, aesthetic, and noetic unity in a similar manner, in each suggesting that pluralism is the more likely hypothesis. Teleologically, we experience the world as a "clash" of purposes, and the monist has to counter the obvious criticism that no unifying purpose is apparent. Aesthetic unity is similarly difficult to find. The world does not, in our daily experience, "hang together" in the sense of telling one story, or exhibiting one narrative. Finally, James (*contra* Royce) denies that there is some "All-knower" who unifies the world noetically, preferring the pluralistic alternative that different, overlapping, and developing (human) systems of knowledge

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[9] See VI.1.2 for some of the reasons James gave for rejecting mechanistic determinism.

cover different aspects of reality (1907, P: 70-72). In this way, the world forms a kind of "noetic continuum", but not an absolute monistic noetic unity (1903-4, MEN: 15).

We can draw several points from James's engagement with pluralism and monism here. The first is that the question is never: are we pluralists or monists? The question is always about to *what extent* the world is unified, and in *what senses*. The second is that in each dimension, pluralism is treated as an *hypothesis* rather than a dogmatic assertion. The third is that James is enough of a monist to allow a single universe of discourse and experience, whilst still maintaining pluralism at other levels and in particular inquiries. The fourth is that, according to James, the pluralistic hypothesis on a metaphysical level is not about the assertion of *permanently irreconcilable* terms, but about a world which is *imperfectly unified*. In this sense, pluralism is less dogmatic than monism is required to be:

> Pluralism […] has no need of this dogmatic rigoristic temper. Provided you grant *some* separation among things, some tremor of independence, some free play of parts on one another, some real novelty or chance, however minute, she is amply satisfied. How much of union there may be is a question that she thinks can only be decided empirically (1907, P: 78).

This leads us to the fifth point to draw out of this discussion: that the distinction between pluralism and monism on any sphere is to be decided *empirically*, rather than *a priori*. And, finally, it is important to note James consistently suggests that in each sphere reality can become *more* unified, in part to due to our own inquiries and actions.

It is the purpose of the next chapter to present and defend James's substantive metaphysical views. However, seeing as radical empiricism provides an excellent example of what I am calling monistic pluralism, it will be worth providing a brief outline here. According to radical empiricism, reality is at bottom made up of "pure experience", which is neutral between multiple interpretations. Depending on the different contexts an object of experience enters into, different properties will be manifest. Most importantly for James's purposes, pure experience is neutral between physical and psychical interpretations. The fundamental stuff of reality is *neither*, though it is ready to become *either* when placed in the right context. This means that a thought of an object and the object itself can be the *same* piece of pure experience, placed in different contexts. Unlike materialism or idealism, the thesis that reality is fundamentally experiential makes no *substantial* claims about the nature of reality. It postulates no common properties or behaviours which must be shared by every element of reality, beyond the merely formal criterion that it be experienceable.[10]

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[10] As James puts it:

The thesis of pure experience, defensible or not, clearly aims to provide a neutral monism which unifies and supports a contentful pluralism. The properties of an object are held to be indeterminate, and dependent in part on the context it is placed in. Nonetheless, radical empiricism prevents the object's pluralistic indeterminacy from a becoming a disjointed chaos of completely different objects by appealing to the object as "pure experience" to maintain the object's identity across contexts. And although radical empiricism rejects the idea that all elements of reality are united by one concrete property or genus, the thesis of pure experience unifies the picture by providing the formal criterion that all of reality is grounded in its capacity to be experienced. We'll see how this monistic pluralism stands up to philosophical criticism in the next chapter.

§2.3 EPISTEMOLOGICAL PLURALISM

Though there is not sufficient space here to go through James's somewhat vexed account of truth, some comments ought to be made to show that here, too, James shows signs of what I am calling "monistic pluralism".

As mentioned in Chapter I, we can find two broad notions of "truth" at work in James: the notion of practical relative truth, that which works *now*, in our current experience, and the notion of absolute truth. Practical truths are pluralistic in nature. At our current stage of many inquiries, we do not have sufficient evidence or resources to decide between several different reasonable options. Each option, insofar as it works within our experience, is *true* in just this sense.[11]

But the observation that each plausible option is *practically* true (true for us, for now, confirmed by our fallible experience) does not mean that each plausible option is *absolutely* true (i.e. that no further experience would show it to be false). And the regulative ideal of truth in this more permanent, absolute, sense keeps us testing our notions against experience and against each other in our attempts to find more and more stable beliefs. We can see this in James's explicit engagement with relativism. James does call himself a "relativist" (by which he appears to mean a non-dogmatist), but he denies

> there is no *general* stuff of which experience at large is made. There are as many stuffs as there are 'natures' in the things experienced. If you ask what any one bit of pure experience is made of, the answer is always the same: "It is made of *that*, of just what appears, of space, of intensity, of flatness" (1904, ERE: 14).

This view does come with some significant problems, the most pressing of which is how James can consistently hold that an object and the thought of that object are identical if they share *no* common properties. Cf. Lovejoy (1930: 46-8); Tower (1931: 594).

[11] See 1907, P: 106; 1909, MT: 143; I.6.3.

of the relativist position the notion that any opinion is as good as any other. For a pragmatist, opinions emerge within a community context, from a background of previous experience. As such, our opinions are rarely arbitrary, but emerge in the context of an ongoing communal inquiry. And these opinions are expected to be tested against, and adapted in light of, future experience. According to James, the "relativist" has never denied "the regulative character" of the notion of absolute truth, but simply challenges "the pretence on anyone's part to have found for certain at any given moment what the shape of that truth is" (1909, MT: 143-5).[12]

So here, again, we have a plurality of different truths which are kept in dialogue with each other by appeal to certain commonalities: the notion of absolute truth, or that "ideal set of formulations towards which all opinions may in the long run of experience be expected to converge" (1909, MT: 143); the notion of a common reality by which we test our various opinions; and the notion of a common formal structure of the various practical truths: that they "work" or prove "satisfactory" in the sense of getting into satisfactory relations with reality (1908, ML: 432).

In a forthcoming paper in the *Oxford Handbook to William James*, Skurpskelis draws attention to a second way in which James is an epistemological pluralist. The pragmatist holds that the way a concept "works" when applied to experience is a mark of its truth.[13] On these grounds, Bertrand Russell (and others) accused the pragmatist of being committed to a kind of epistemological utilitarianism, which would permit a subject to believe falsehoods if they were sufficiently functional. Defending himself in personal correspondence, James writes the following:

> In a nutshell my opinion is this: that instead of there being one universal relation *sui generis* called "truth" between any reality and an idea, there are a host of particular relations varying according to special circumstances and constituted by the manner of "working" or "leading" of the idea through the surrounding experiences of which both the reality and the idea are part (Letter to B. Russell, 1908, CWJ12:18).

According to the pragmatist, there are diverse ways in which an idea can be related to reality such that it is "true". The kind of relation, and the kind of verification an idea can find, will be different in different cases. For instance, an idea *copying* reality is one way that an idea can be related to reality, but it is not the only one (1907, P: 102). Similarly, direct acquaintance with a sensory particular is one paradigm case of verification, but is by no means the only one (1908, CWJ12: 18). These diverse relations and verifications are united by the pragmatist concept of truth, meaning that the concepts would or do "work", in the sense of bringing us into a better relation with reality. James thus offers a

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[12] James's position on truth in this regard connects with his views on common-sensism, as well as fallibilism. See I.3; I.5.
[13] See I.6.3.

monistic but formal criterion of truth (that a true idea is what works), which unites the pluralistic vision that our concrete epistemic dealings with reality are a "jungle of empirical workings and leadings, and their nearer or ulterior terminations" (James, 1909, MT: 89). We will examine more closely what James means by truth being a matter of "leading" in the next chapter.[14]

§2.4 AXIOLOGICAL PLURALISM

In many ways, the pluralism which James advocates in his moral and ethical thinking is his least worked out. It is the aim of Part II of this thesis to work out James's ethical theory in full. Here, I merely aim to show that we can and should consider his pluralism in this sphere as analogous to his pluralism at the meta-philosophical, metaphysical and epistemological spheres, in the sense of providing us with what I have called a "monistic pluralism".

Values, like truths in the sense of "leadings", or like the notion of continuity in James's metaphysical work, are relational. They are some living being's response to the world. Moral facts, or "moral relations" cannot exist without some sentient being (1891, WB: 145). "Good" is the satisfaction of those demands which a sentient creature makes on its environment. James calls "the *most* universal principle" of his ethics the notion that "*the essence of good is simply to satisfy demand*" (1891, WB: 153). Demands have no common content, save that they are demanded by some sentient creature:

> The demand may be for anything under the sun. There is really no more ground for supposing that all our demands can be accounted for by one universal underlying kind of motive than there is ground for supposing that all physical phenomena are cases of a single law. The elementary forces in ethics are probably as plural as those of physics are (1891, WB: 153).

What James is offering us then is a formally monistic thesis (all goods are demands) which supports and allows for contentful pluralism (demands have no common content).

Each demand has, *prima facie*, an equal obligation to be met (1891, WB: 148). Solely on the level of demands, then, there is no way of telling which ought to be done when conflict between values occurs. Does this mean that we ought to merely actualise our own values? This would lead to the kind of antagonism or dogmatism which T&A are

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[14] See IV.2

concerned about. According to James, the history of philosophy shows us that every attempt to find some universal content by which we could assess and order our ethical lives has failed (1891, WB: 152). So, rather than providing a monistic account of *content* which determines our moral obligations, James suggests that we should look at the *formal* nature of good: that it is the satisfaction of demand. This purely formal quality does determine a guiding ethical principle, for James:

> Since everything which is demanded is by that fact a good, must not the guiding principle for ethical philosophy […] be simply to satisfy at all times *as many demands as we can*? That act must be the best act, accordingly, which makes for the *best whole*, in the sense of awakening the least sum of dissatisfactions […] *Invent some manner* of realizing your own ideals which will also satisfy the alien demands – that and that only is the path of peace! (1891, WB: 155).

From the recognition that the formal nature of the good is to satisfy demand, we move to the recognition that each demand deserves to be met, in principle, and finally to the principle that we should aim to create a world in which the most diverse array of ideals can be actualised.[15]

James points to several moral phenomena which this pluralistic view allows for. He connects this type of pluralism with realism about chance, novelty and freedom.[16] Without the indeterminacy which (metaphysical) pluralism stands for, free choice would be impossible. James also connects pluralism and chance with finding our lives meaningful. Only if we see that acting under our ideals can bring about changes in the world will they be sufficiently meaningful.[17] Similarly, pluralism is the only way to understand moral phenomena such as regret. James connects these ideas together in "Dilemma of Determinism" (1884), where he tells us that:

> I cannot understand the willingness to act, no matter how we feel, without the belief that acts are really good and bad. I cannot understand the belief that an act is bad, without regret at its happening. I cannot understand regret without the admission of real, genuine possibilities in the world. Only *then* is it other than a mockery to feel, after we have failed to do our best, that an irreparable opportunity is gone from the universe, the loss of which it must forever after mourn (1884, WB: 135).

James is here connecting (at least) what I have called here "metaphysical" and "axiological" pluralisms. Pluralism on the metaphysical sphere is required for us to act

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[15] Many interpreters of James worry that the "caustic principle" expressed in this passage commits him to a monism which conflicts with his pluralism, presenting a fundamental tension in his ethics (cf. R. Putnam, 1990: 84; Bird 1986: 155). My suggestion in response is that James's formal monism does not conflict with, and in fact supports, his contentful pluralism.

[16] E.g. 1884, WB: 137

[17] See VII.1.1

freely under our ideals, and pluralism on the axiological sphere is required for us to feel that these acts are meaningful, seeing as real value can be gained and lost in the world.[18]

This is just a sketch of James's ethical position. There is, as yet, much that is problematic an in need of elaboration. For now, it is sufficient to note the kind of pluralism which James is expressing in his moral theory. James is suggesting that there is a common formal definition of good (the satisfaction of demand), but no common content shared between all goods. Again, this formal monism supports and allows for a pluralism of goods.

§3. THE JAMESIAN RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE.

In this final section, I aim to look in turn at each of the challenges to pluralism raised by T&A (§1), and see what possible response the Jamesian pluralism I have outlined (§2) might make to them.

The first challenge was:

> *(i)*   That (deep) pluralism is incompatible with (inquiry) pragmatism
>   because the claim that values are necessarily incompatible blocks
>   the road of inquiry.

For this claim to make sense, we have to keep in mind T&A's very specific account of deep pluralism. To be a deep pluralist, we have to hold that values are irreconcilable by their nature, and that they will always remain so. They are correct that such a deep pluralism would block the road of inquiry, and that no pragmatist has, or could, hold such a pluralism.

The first thing to note here is that James never treats pluralism as a dogmatic assertion. Pragmatists are of necessity wary of any assertion that is not treated as hypothetical, or not reached as an outcome of inquiry. Pluralism is no exception. When James talks of pluralism as a metaphysical notion, he treats it as an hypothesis which is coordinate with monism, and which should be assessed on its practical and experiential merits.

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[18] Monists can also recognise that there are situations in which value can be realised, and in which we might fail to realise that value. But James is primarily talking here about *dilemmas* or genuine options between two competing plausible claims about value. The monist might allow for situations in which we fail to realise value, but recognise that it can be "made up for" later. The pluralist is open to the possibility that, once lost, a *type* of value might be lost from the world forever.

Metaphysical statements are not the same as dogmatic ones. The (classical) pragmatist is happy to entertain metaphysical hypotheses, but will always reject dogmatic ontological assertions. Nor does the notion that pluralism is a permanent possibility of the world entail that *the same* portions of the world will be forever in conflict. The resolution of one conflict may well lead us to apprehend another.[19]

What does "deep" pluralism look like to inquiry pragmatism, when dogmatism has been rejected? James does not hold that values *are* by their nature irreconcilable, or that those which appear to be so now *will* always remain so. But he does entertain the hypothesis that pluralism is a possibly permanent state of affairs in certain areas of our experience and inquiry. Put otherwise, a reasonable outcome of our inquiry could well be that two options are incompossible, but that both are valuable. For James, such a reality explains the phenomenon of regret, when we are forced to choose between two really valuable options (1884, WB: 135).

Misak raises this kind of issue in her response to T&A's first paper. She distances Peircean pragmatism from forms of pragmatism which see pluralism as a good or desirable thing (Misak 2005: 129).[20] But she suggests that our accounts of morality should give space for the possibility of genuinely fraught moral decisions, for "situations in which wretched compromise is the best that we can manage" and in which "there is no right answer to be had". Similarly, we should not ignore cases in which there are a number of "equally good and culturally specific ways of answering a moral question". In such cases, we might suspect that the answer that will be reached at the end of that particular moral inquiry is disjunctive: "(*P or Q*) may be true for the whole community of inquirers" (Misak 2005: 133-4).

T&A's response to this claim is illuminating. They offer an alternative interpretation of the "wretched situation", in which it is not that there is no *right* answer to a given dilemma, but that there is no *decent* answer. A utilitarian might hold that given such a dilemma, that there was a right choice, but no easy choice, or no choice which avoided massive suffering. They also suggest that the pragmatist is obliged always to see disjunctive conclusions as merely temporary, to be overcome by future inquiry. To be

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[19] Eldridge makes a similar point in response to T&A's original paper: "[i]t may be that important differences will always be with us. But that does not necessarily mean that there will always be permanent conflicts about the *same* values and practices" (Eldridge 2005: 120).

[20] Misak suggests that the Peircean pragmatist sees disagreement as pointing at "a problem or […] a mistake on someone's part" rather than "glory[ing] in it" (Misak 2005: 131). Despite this "reluctant attitude" towards pluralism, however, the Peircean pragmatist "can and must celebrate and encourage the diversity of views" (Misak 2005: 129). Misak does not elaborate on exactly how pragmatists should consistently hold the view that diversity is to be celebrated whilst pluralism is to be only reluctantly acknowledged and seen as the result of a mistake, but it is possible that she is pointing to the kind of modest epistemological picture T&A present in their 2016 paper.

pluralist, the pragmatist would have to see inquiry into such a disjunctive situation as "*in principle futile*" (T&A, 2005b: 154-155). Pragmatists, though, are always open to more inquiry should it be necessary, and so they cannot be consistent pluralists. The assumption here, then, is that only a non-disjunctive answer can truly satisfy the pragmatist. Anything else merely blocks the road of inquiry.

This is an interesting response, but I believe it somewhat begs the question against the pluralist. The pragmatist pluralist will not think that *any* answer goes. A disjunctive answer at the end of inquiry will be one which has been reasoned through, and which has met all of the necessary requirements of inquiry. If, at the end of a moral inquiry, we have reached the conclusion that either value P or value Q are reasonable options, though we cannot realise both at once, there is no reason to see this as less stable than a non-disjunctive end to inquiry. It is true that the pragmatist must be willing to revise this disjunctive opinion when appropriate, and must consider it in principle open to more inquiry. But this pragmatist policy will apply to both stable disjunctive *and* non-disjunctive beliefs. Disjunctive conclusions are no more dogmatic or unstable than non-disjunctive ones.

The next challenge is:

> *(ii)*   That (deep) pluralism is incompatible with (inquiry) pragmatism because it renders individual claims about the good to be infallible and static.

As we have already seen, any system which claims that a belief is not subject to revision in light of future experience is incompatible with any form of sensible pragmatism. But this dogmatism is not required of deep (i.e. metaphysical) pluralism. We might conclude that particular values are irreconcilable as a result of some of their features, without concluding that they must *always* remain so. James's metaphysically pluralistic hypothesis is that *incommensurability* will always remain a part of the moral universe, not that any particular case of incommensurable goods will remain. Hard decisions, compromises, and the possibility of regret will remain permanent parts of the world, even if every actual situation reaches agreement.

What would it be for two goods that were once incommensurable to "become" commensurable? Two types of case spring to mind. There are cases in which we need to re-articulate or rethink our values in order to see them as in fact compatible. And there are cases in which some change needs to occur in the environment those values are active in for values to become commensurable. Inventive social, political, or technological breakthroughs can allow values which were previously irreconcilable to become reconciled. This kind of growth might also reveal previously uncontentious values to be flawed, in need of revision, or incommensurable with some newly articulated value. According to the pluralist, the creation of innovations which reveal new values and

problematise old ones will never cease, and moral agents will always be involved in creating and deciding between new values. None of this requires the pluralist to think that any of the competing goods are static. Any pluralist pragmatist will see all values as fallible and subject to growth and change.

Such an answer steers dangerously close to the assertion that no value is *really* irreconcilable to the pragmatist. If two values which were previously irreconcilable are reconciled through some novel invention or compromise, then weren't they *always* reconcilable in the long run? And wouldn't this be tantamount to a kind of rejection of pluralism? However, such a rejoinder would miss James's point. It can be a truly creative act to bring about the possibility of reconciliation. It would perhaps have been possible to have never reconciled this set of values, perhaps because reconciling some other set made reconciling the first impossible. It is in this sense that James sees us as the *creators* as well as the *discovers* of our moral landscape.[21]

In short, then, being a "deep" pluralist, in the sense of seeing values as being irreconcilable because of some features of their nature, does not commit the pragmatist to seeing those values or their environment as static and unchangeable, and does not commit the pluralist to seeing any particular set of values as being permanently irreconcilable.

The next challenge is:

> *(iii)* That (deep) pluralism is incompatible with (meaning) pragmatism because pragmatism cannot allow for inconsistency on the level of practical content.

All pragmatists hold some version of the pragmatic maxim, which we can understand in its broadest terms as the claim that we can fully determine a concept's meaning by defining the experiential phenomena which can be expected to follow from its being true.[22] Applying the pragmatic maxim to a set of apparently opposed or mutually exclusive options can help overcome the disjunction. Elucidating the practical effects of each might reveal one to be more plausible or preferable, allow us to dissolve the distinction by revealing that there is no practical difference, or at least allow us to see what is really at stake in the conflict and how we might go about adjudicating it.

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[21] Jackman (2005) raises similar concerns in his response to T&A's original article. An important feature of the Jamesian account of value is that we are in some sense "makers" as well as "recorders" of value. Jackman places more weight on this constructivist element in James than I do, but certainly is right to bring our attention to the sense in which moral inquiry shapes our moral world, as well as merely discovering it. This notion is the central focus of Chapter VII.

[22] Peirce, 1905, CP5.412; James, 1907, P: 29-30; Chapter I.2-3.

On one interpretation of pragmatism, then, T&A are correct to say that it is incompatible with the kind of pluralism which postulates different *types of meaning*. But, in fact, the application of the pragmatist maxim is another instance of "monistic pluralism". Pragmatism provides a common vocabulary (that of practical meaning) which unifies different options, but (in many cases) maintains the distinctions between those options. This is why James uses the metaphor of a corridor to describe pragmatism. Pragmatism in principle allows *any* inquiry to be pursued, it just requires that each be expressible in practical terms (1907, P: 32). In some sense, the whole of *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909) should be seen as an attempt by James to do just this with the monism–pluralism distinction. Exploring the practical dimensions of the distinction makes it clearer what the disagreement *is,* but it does not always tell us which option is superior.

It is true that any view which denied having *any* practical ramifications could not be considered valid by the pragmatist. But it is not clear that deep pluralism requires this. Ontological disagreements can be translated into practical content, and can remain disagreements. This leads us to the next challenge:

> *(iv)*   That (deep) pluralism is incompatible with (meaning) pragmatism
> because the metaphysical assertions of ontological pluralism have
> no practical consequences, and so are meaningless.

As I've already mentioned, James actually spent a great deal of his career discussing exactly what the pragmatic difference *was* between pluralism and monism, considered as mutually exclusive metaphysical options. According to James's analysis, there were meant to be deep practical differences between the two, which in turn had profound ramifications on the way we apprehend and act in the world.[23] It is unclear, in light of this, in what sense T&A think that metaphysical pluralism can be said to have no practical ramifications.

T&A suggest that any metaphysical account of the "incomparability of values" would have to explain that incomparability "in terms of features beyond our practices of comparison" and will thus, according to the pragmatist, be without content (T&A, 2005a: 108). However, no pragmatist claims that the content of belief is *only* describable in terms of practical content. The pragmatist holds that there cannot be intellectual difference without practical difference, and that where there is no practical difference, intellectual difference is merely verbal. But pragmatists can still appeal to metaphysical notions, as long as we can pin-point exactly what practical difference such notions would make if true. In the current case, if ontological pluralism were true, we would expect to find that values resisted being completely reconciled in the long run, and that value conflict

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[23] See VII.1

would never be completely removed from our experience. If ontological monism were true, we would expect to find the opposite. Of course, such hypotheses require a long time to work themselves out, so anyone attempting to suggest *before the fact* that one or the other hypothesis is *definitely* true will be suspect. But it is not the case that these metaphysical views have no practical effects, unless we parse "practical effects" positivistically as merely meaning "sensational effects".

Moreover, it seems as if T&A themselves have already laid out many of the practical ramifications of ontological pluralism. Deep pluralism, on their account at least, allows us to pursue the actualisation of our values at the expense of everyone else's, or else leads us to a kind of modus vivendi pluralism. This means that holding a metaphysical belief about the nature of value leads to practical social and political ramifications.

Our next challenge is:

> *(v)*   That (shallow) pluralism is compatible with (inquiry) pragmatism, but is not really pluralism, as the only properties it shares with other pluralisms can be accepted by monists.

Shallow pluralism is defined by its tolerance of disagreement, and its acknowledgement that we do not currently have criteria for agreement. Both of these properties can be accepted by monists. Therefore, there is nothing distinctively pluralistic about shallow pluralism.

It is not the case that two sets sharing two common properties are identical. It is only by sharing *all* the properties that the two sets become identical.[24] There are properties which monism is committed to which shallow pluralism is not. For instance, shallow pluralism should still predict the perseverance of moral disagreements, even if they are not the *same* disagreements, whereas monism will predict that all disagreements ought, in the long run, be removed. Monism must hold that there is only *one* correct answer to the question of what is valuable, even if this answer is not currently known, whereas there is no reason that even a shallow form of pluralism needs to be committed to this proposition.[25] Further, as we have already seen in our treatment of (*i*) above, there is no reason why shallow pluralism could not be satisfied with a disjunctive conclusion to inquiry, whereas monism will be in principle opposed to such a conclusion. As such, though shallow pluralism has some qualities which it shares with monism, there are some propositions which each side is committed to whilst the other is not.

Similar to (*v*), the next challenge is:

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[24] As Anderson (2015) has recently argued (2015: 108-9).

[25] In their response to T&A's paper, Sullivan and Lysaker (2005) suggest as similar point in Deweyan terminology: that the pluralist forgoes "the quest for certainty" (2005: 140).

> *(vi)* That (shallow) pluralism is compatible with (inquiry) pragmatism, but is not really pluralism, as it requires that conflicting accounts of values are still responses to the same world, and thus a kind of monism.

We've seen that, for James, there are several levels on which we can be pluralists or monists. No sensible pluralist would deny that the world is "one" in the minimal and abstract sense that we are *talking about the same thing*.[26] It would be profoundly anti-empirical to deny this, and it would block any possibility of inquiry into matters of value if different value systems set up their own objects.

However, in James's radical empiricism we have seen that the same object can feature in different contexts, and display different properties as a result. The same is true of evaluative properties. Take T&A's environmentalist example. The tree seen by the environmentalist and the tree seen by the logger are certainly the same object. But the tree exhibits different properties in the two contexts. In one, the tree is seen as having instrumental value as a source of fuel. In the other, it is seen as having intrinsic value as a living thing. It is not the case that one of these people is straightforwardly *wrong* about the value of the tree. It is that the tree is a complex enough object that it can exhibit different qualities of value depending on the context it is placed in. Values are relational. There is certainly a discussion to be had about how these values ought to be prioritised, but the fact that the same object can exhibit two kinds of value neither commits the pluralist to monism nor to relativism.

So how are we to decide between interpretations which emerge from two contexts, both of which are responsive to real properties of the object? James, perhaps unhelpfully, tells us that we must decide which value or context will allow the "best universe", understood as allowing for the most diverse array of values. This is a decision which is not to be made by either partisan, but "through the aid of the experience of other [people]" (1891, WB: 158). We will return to this issue in later chapters (VI.2.2).

The next challenge is:

> *(vii)* That (*modus vivendi*) pluralism is compatible with pragmatism but is pragmatically undesirable, because it is unstable and will lead to conflict in the long run.

The plausibility of this challenge rests on a particular notion of human nature, and of how values are held, which might just as easily be denied. In the picture that T&A present, the assumption is that human beings are fundamentally egocentric, and that each partisan wants *only* the actualisation of their own values, at the expense of everyone

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[26] See 1907, P: 65; §2.2.

else's. But this is a very strange starting point. Human beings have evolved to be social and moral creatures, and such an egocentric model is actually quite opposed to a pragmatist notion of human nature. It is more likely, from a pragmatist perspective, that the recognition that a value can only be actualised at the expense of some other group's values will be seen as good reason to re-examine that value. Though we have a tendency within contemporary philosophy to see the self-interested view of human nature as being somehow more naturalistic than other views, the pragmatists did not. James took as his starting point human beings who were already invested and interested in each other, and this presupposition should be understood when approaching his pluralism. I contend that this is at least as plausible a view of human nature as the one put forward by T&A.[27]

Secondly, in this challenge, T&A might be seen as guilty of a version of what James calls "vicious abstractionism". Vicious abstraction is the philosophical practice of drawing out salient aspects of a concrete situation in order to facilitate analysis, but then treating the situation as *only* containing those salient aspects in a way which violates the reality of the concrete situation (1909, MT: 135). Rarely is value conflict as black and white as the cases T&A are taking to be paradigmatic. We usually start our moral dealings with a great deal in common with one another, and during moral disagreements we tend to appeal to other values which we take our opponents to share with us. We tend to have an interest in making the other person come to see our view as correct, rather than just wanting our value to succeed at any cost.

Consider, again, the case of the environmentalist and the logger. If we analyse this case such that the logger is holding value x and the activist holding value y, then by virtue of this analysis, the two have nothing in common, and conflict seems inevitable. However, in real concrete situations like this, the activist will appeal to other values which she assumes the logger will share: a compassion for others, a desire for the next generation to have sustainable resources, general aesthetic values, and so on. Equally, the logger might to the same, appealing to the practical values of industry, of having an economy which can sustain public services, or just the importance of providing for their family. It is only in extreme circumstances, where conversation fails, or where some insensitivity prevents one or both sides from comprehending a particular value, that we resort to conflict of the sort that T&A take to be standard.

Even if we accept this, though, what about these extreme cases? At the heart of these examples are cases in which one value can *only be actualised at the expense of some other value*. Elsewhere, T&A use as an example extreme religious believers, who hold that a

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[27] Though I have said that "pragmatists" tend to have a more positive view of human nature than the Hobbesian view presupposes, we have seen that Peirce actually had a very pessimistic view about *individual* human nature, though a more optimistic one about *collective* human nature (1898, CP1.661-6; II.3).

good world would be one *without* "opposing" religions or world-views (T&A, 2011). I suspect James is always going to reject such positions as dogmatic. Any value system which sees itself as absolute, and as is in principle not able to co-exist with other values, is not allowed by a true pluralism. In James's pluralism, each value must articulate itself in such a way that it does not negate or reject other values, and is open to coexistence. Dogmatic and absolutist values must be rejected as reasonable positions. Such an answer, though, will be seen by T&A as an appeal to some value of tolerance or reciprocity outside of our own, and so not a real pluralism.

It is to this challenge which we now turn:

> *(viii)* That (recognitionist *modus vivendi*) pluralism is compatible with pragmatism, but is internally incoherent because it requires partisans to place more weight on overarching values of tolerance than on their own.

If in order to avoid value conflict the pluralist appeals to some overarching value such as "tolerance", then by that fact they have ceased to be a pluralist. Interestingly, we can see such an approach being taken by some figures within the pragmatist tradition. Josiah Royce, for instance, suggests that we should be loyal not to our individual values, but to loyalty *itself*, which each particular instance of value shares.[28] Avowed pluralist Alain Locke takes the same strategy. Locke sees that there are functional constants beneath our apparent differences, and that we should see ourselves as loyal to those functional constants, rather than just to our particular values.[29]

This move from being loyal to our particular values, to being loyal to an overarching value which is more inclusive, would be seen by T&A as a move from pluralism to monism. Though this *is* the case with Royce, who was after all an open monist, such a move does not result in a monism for Locke. Locke does suggest that we should be loyal to more general types of values that are common across cultures ("functional constants"), rather than (just) the particular values of our culture. But Locke also thinks that there are multiple functional constants, which are grounded in human

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[28] Royce puts his theory in brief: "In choosing and in serving the cause to which you are to be loyal, be, in any case, loyal to loyalty" (Royce, 1908: 121).

[29] Here's Locke laying out this picture:

> we shall have a warrant for taking as the proper centre of value loyalty neither the worship of definitions or formulae nor the competitive monopolising of value claims, but the goal of maximising the value-mode itself as an attitude and activity (Locke, 1930/1989: 48).

See Williams (forthcoming), for an examination of Locke's position in this regard, and a comparison of his value pluralism with James's.

phenomenology.[30] As such his is a move from what he sees as an "anarchistic" pluralism, to a more structured version of pluralism. This already puts pressure on T&A's claim that any such move results in monism.

Does James make the kind of move which T&A are criticising here? Two possibilities for such an overarching value present themselves given our analysis of James's position: tolerance or diversity, and truth.

Let us take tolerance and diversity first. James does seem to advocate that the best ideal will be the most inclusive ideal, the one which finds a way for as many values to co-exist as possible. Similarly, James appeals to diversity as a way of assessing our different values, suggesting that we ought to aim at a world with as diverse array of values as possible. In both cases, James appears to be appealing to an overarching value which trumps particular values, and so advocating a monism, rather than a pluralism.

However, such appearances are deceptive. The move towards diversity and tolerance is meant to emerge from the recognition that several difference claims about value can be seen as equally reasonable. On the basis of this recognition, we are moved to make a world in which as diverse an array of values as possible are able to be actualised. The pluralism comes first, and the monism emerges to support it.[31]

James also asserts that all valuers should be interested in the truth of their value. This, again, could be seen as an appeal to an overarching epistemic value under which our particular values are subsumed. But James will also deny this. As valuers, we have an interest in our values being coherent, consistent, and able to be held in the face of real world experience. We do not merely want to assert that our values *are* true, we want to hold true values. This is not to place some abstract notion of "truth" above our particular, concrete, values. Rather, truth emerges as a product of our striving to articulate and discover how the values which we actually hold work, how stable they are in the long run, how they interact with other values which we and others hold, and how they cope with novel situations.[32]

In each of these options, then, James presents a kind of monism which emerges from, and supports, rather than supplants, pluralism. In James's monistic pluralism, it is the pluralism which is in the driver's seat.

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[30] Locke, 1930/1989: 43.

[31] This will be examined in more detail in later chapters (VI.3.4).

[32] This will be examined in more detail in later chapters (VI.3.1and VI.3.9).

The final challenge from T&A's earlier paper is:

> *(ix)*   That (indifferentist *modus vivendi*) pluralism is compatible with
> pragmatism, but is pragmatically undesirable because it leads to
> people being indifferent about their own values.

Certainly, if the only way in which we can resolve apparently conflicting values is to become indifferent to *all* values, including our own, then we have succeeded only in preventing our own values from being be motivating. To a pragmatist, values which we cannot act on are not true values at all. And so, indifferentism is tantamount to nihilism.

However, James in fact diagnoses some forms of *monism* as entailing this sort of indifferentism, and sees pluralism as a kind of remedy. James is particularly interested in rejecting monistic idealism, which he saw as committed to the view that everything in the universe is already unified and complete. According to James, this tends to lead to a kind of indifferentism in which we see our actions as not mattering in the grand cosmic whole (1907, P: 133). As James puts it: "*indifferentism* is the true outcome of every view of the world which makes infinity and continuity to be its essence" (1882, WB: 221). This just to say, it is not only pluralism, but also monism which can lead us to indifferentism.[33]

Moving now to T&A's more recent paper, the first challenge is:

> *(x)*   That (popular) pluralism is not value-neutral. Concepts such as
> "tolerance" gain their content from a particular perspective of
> what counts as tolerable. (Popular) pluralism is hollow.

The notion that tolerance has bounds is not one which is alien to the classical pragmatists. But neither should we think of pluralism as being hollow, and as being constrained by mere partisan values.

The pragmatist sees prevailing beliefs about value as emerging from a community's past experience.[34] As such, it is true in one sense to suggest that what we find tolerable is constrained by our community's conception of what is valuable. But this does not make pluralism hollow. Toleration of *every* possible value would not be desirable. Instead, James's pragmatism allows us to be reasonably tolerant, where what is reasonable or plausible is constrained by our culture's collective experience. Anyone who today raises the possibility that slavery, sexual discrimination, or totalitarianism is valuable is not, and should not be, taken seriously. We have tried those ways of life, and have found that they do not work. It is no more required that the pluralist take these possibilities

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[33] See VII.1-3 for more on how monism leads to indifferentism in its various forms.
[34] See I.2; I.5; II.3; VII.2.5.

seriously than that the scientist is constrained to take seriously the ancient Greek theory of the atom as a plausible hypothesis in contemporary chemistry.

However, there is a potential problem. If what we are tolerant of is entirely determined by our culture's past, then it seems that we are bound to find conflict when we confront another culture. But if we are to see our *own* values as emerging out of a reasonable process of inquiry and experience, then we have no reason to suspect other culture's values as not having emerged out of the same procedure. This prevents us from seeing another culture's values as straightforwardly incorrect, absurd, or wrong, when they differ from our own. To have lasted as long as they have, they must "work" in some sense and in some degree. Criticism is still possible, but rarely wholesale rejection.

Similarly, such a view does not prevent an array of reasonable disagreement internal to a culture, nor the development of novel approaches to value. But rarely, if ever, is a complete rejection of a culture's background values performed. When new values arise, and new ways of life strive to make themselves actualised within a culture, often part of what is involved is showing the consistency of that way of life with others already accepted. Novel values emerge out of a cultural background, and are responsive to it. Change is rarely so radical that we cannot find any continuity between a new value and others which are held by that culture.[35]

The kind of pluralism which is being advocated by James, then, is not one in which we ought to be tolerant of every opinion. But that does not make his pluralism hollow. Like any inquiry, there are hypotheses which are outside the realms of plausibility, but there is also room for a multitude of hypotheses about what and how we should value.

The next challenge is:

> *(xi)*   That pluralism must have some substantive content which the non-pluralist must deny.

According to pragmatism, for two claims to be seen as distinct, there must be some practical consequence resulting from one which does not result from the other. It follows that if pluralism is to be distinct from monism, it must have some distinctive practical effect.

I have already suggested in my answer to (*v*) above, there are several practical differences between monism and pluralism. In their more recent paper, T&A accept this, suggesting that for the monist it is conceptually necessary that all goods are commensurable, whereas the pluralist holds no such prescription. For this reason, pluralism "provides a kind of safeguard against false unities and syntheses among seemingly disparate values". Further, perhaps in response to Misak's criticism of their

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[35] See VI.3 for more on moral inquiry and progress on the Jamesian account.

earlier paper, the authors now suggest that pluralism enables us to account for tragic cases, in which "one does something wrong *no matter what one does*". As pluralists, we can entertain the possibility that there is no correct answer in any given situation, which is more in line with our moral phenomenology, and, further, encourages "a measure of moral gentleness, generosity, consideration, and forgiveness in the face of the moral struggles of others" (T&A, 2016: 24).

In short, T&A reach the conclusion that pluralism is best considered as an attitude which is conducive to inquiry, and which enables us to be more sympathetic and open-minded than the monist. I suggest that this is precisely right, and at the end of the day this is the driving force of James's pluralism. But such a position will require more than "epistemological" pluralism, understood as holding that pluralism is *entirely* the result of epistemological limitations. We've seen that, for James, the phenomenon of regret requires us to see that there is some real value which is not actualised in the world. Solely epistemological pluralism will involve us interpreting the tragedy as a result of not having the conceptual resources for determining the correct choice. In order to see the tragedy as a situation in which any outcome will result in some *real* value not being actualised, or some real value as being lost, we are required to entertain a more metaphysical reading of pluralism than T&A allow for. We'll return to this when we consider (*xiii*), below.

Before that, let us consider the following challenge:

> (*xii*)   That the (metaphysical) pluralist cannot assert that a world in which two different goods are satisfied is better than one in which only one is satisfied.

The monist asserts that all claims of "the good" must have some content in common, in order to be recognised as instances of the good. From this assertion, we can move to the claim that a world with more of this content is a world with more good. Thus Mill, for instance, will suggest that all goods involve pleasure, and therefore a world with more pleasure will be a world with more good. The pluralist, who denies that there is some content shared by all goods, cannot make this claim and, therefore, T&A assert, they cannot make the claim that a world with more *goods* is better than a world with a world with fewer. There is no common measure which indicates one world as better off than another.

But, as we have seen from our analysis of James, he does not assert that there is *nothing* in common between different goods, though he does assert that there is no necessary similarity in content. There are *formal* similarities between assertions of the good. Each good has to be the satisfaction of some concrete demand, and this satisfaction involves some reality outside of our valuation. Exactly what "satisfaction" means will differ

depending on the good in question. And as we go along, we get better at determining what really leads to satisfaction in the long run.

So, James can agree to the claim that in order to judge whether one state of affairs is better than another we need some measurement of good, without suggesting that this requires us to assert a content which all goods must share. One world is better if it allows more goods to be satisfied, and if those goods are more liable to be found satisfying in the long run. It is unclear why this is meant to be more complicated than assessing two different states of affairs on the basis of content. Once again, James asserts a formal monism which supports a contentful pluralism.[36]

The penultimate challenge is:

> *(xiii)* That (modest epistemological) pluralism is quietist about the ontology of value.

According to James, there are matters about which it is impossible to be truly quietist, or neutral. We can see this in his rejection of agnosticism.[37] We can either believe that the world has a religious element, or not. In either case, we must act as if one or the other were true. Seeing as we are acting as if one is true, there is no practical difference between this state and belief. We must, in some sense, believe in one or the other. The agnostic is, to all intents and purposes, acting like an atheist. As such, this is one of the cases in which "the universe will have no neutrals" (1882, WB: 89).

I suspect James would present the difference between monism and pluralism as one of these options. It is after all a "dilemma", for James, and the most "pregnant" in all philosophy (1910, SPP: 61). James presents monism and pluralism as two coordinate hypotheses which we do not yet have sufficient intellectual or empirical evidence to choose between. Yet they are mutually exclusive, and therefore one of these must be true. Seeing as they exhaust the possibilities of action and interpretation, we cannot act as if *neither* is true. We are constrained to decide one way or another, even if we pretend that we are "agnostic" or "quietist".[38]

Moreover, as mentioned in our analysis of (*xi*), above, it is unclear that the modest epistemological pluralism which T&A advocate really remains "quietist" about this issue. Solely epistemological pluralism will not allow us to feel, in truly tragic situations, that some value will be lost regardless of the outcome, and it does not allow us to feel regret at such a loss.

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[36] I explore the various notions of moral progress that James allows for in VII.2.4.

[37] 1896, WB: 20; 30; 1896, WB: 50. See VII.1.4.

[38] In other words, it is a will-to-believe option. See VII.1.4.

If all T&A mean by "quietism" is that we cannot pronounce, *a priori* about the correctness or in-correctness of metaphysical pluralism, then this is fine. The pragmatist will hold this view, in principle, about *any* hypothesis. However, if by "quietism" we mean that we must stop holding (fallible) beliefs and asking questions about the ontological nature of value, then their prohibition would place a large block in the road of inquiry.

The final challenge is:

> *(xiv)*   That modest epistemological pluralism is supportive of attractive social norms, but does not entail them, and that there is no connection between metaphysical pluralism and attractive social norms.

James quite clearly links his metaphysical pluralism with democracy, and, vice versa, monism with despotism and totalitarianism. T&A reject this claim, and in fact hold that pluralism is compatible with totalitarianism (T&A, 2005a: 103).

James is sometimes less than clear about whether he views the dilemma between monism and pluralism as a descriptive or a normative one. It is perhaps most accurate to describe it as a description which makes a normative difference. The monist tends to see difference as problematic, as something which ought in every case to be overcome in order to give us a correct account of the world. This means that they tend to ignore difference, or downplay it, and certainly will never see it as a positive. The pluralist, on the other hand, tends to see difference as in some sense expected, or perhaps even desired. They need not see *conflict* as desirable, but perhaps will see a world with a number of different viewpoints as a richer and more interesting place. The monist, on the other hand, will find such a place "messy", and strive to reduce this multiplicity to one answer or measure.

The pluralist by definition believes that it is likely that other people's values are just as valid as their own, and so is likely to be more tolerant of others, and to revise her opinion as to what is valuable on the basis of encounters with others. The monist tends to look for one value or one measure of value. Though it is not necessary that the monist see *their own* value or measure as the absolutely correct one, if they *do* this will lead them to the kind of totalitarianism which T&A claim is consistent with metaphysical pluralism.

A necessary component of metaphysical pluralism is that other views besides your own are just as worthy as being considered values as your own are. Is this kind of pluralism consistent with totalitarianism? Possibly. But T&A do not quite capture this possibility in their criticism. Though there is nothing preventing the metaphysical pluralist from pursuing their own value at the expense of other peoples', such an action does not gel well with the view that other people's values are as valuable as one's own. A pragmatist,

who holds that beliefs are habits of action, would question whether the totalitarian was really a pluralist.

§4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the claims that Talisse and Aikin make in two separate papers (2005; 2016) regarding the connection between pragmatism and pluralism. In the first, their central claim is that *all* forms of pluralism that deserve the name are incompatible with all forms of pragmatism. In their later paper, they make the amended claim that pragmatists can be modest epistemological pluralists, but with the two caveats that the "modest epistemological" component is doing the majority of the work in defending the virtues pragmatists tend to connect with pluralism, and that pragmatists must remain quietists about the metaphysical status of pluralism. By giving a detailed examination of James's expressions of pluralism in meta-philosophical, metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological spheres, I suggested that there was a common structure to them, which I entitled "monistic pluralism". In each of these spheres James expresses pluralism about *content*, whilst postulating a commonality of *form*. I then reviewed Talisse and Aikin's challenges to the pragmatist pluralist with this view in mind. Upon examining Talisse and Aikin's fourteen separate claims about the relation between pragmatism and pluralism, I suggested that in most cases Jamesian pragmatism is consistent with pluralism.

In these first three chapters I have defended James's realism, his individualism, and his pluralism. I turn now to James's attempt to unify these apparently contradictory commitments in his metaphysics.

CHAPTER IV:

REALISM AND RADICAL EMPIRICISM

§1. INTRODUCTION: RADICAL EMPIRICISM

It is the contention of this thesis that James can offer an account of ethics which unifies his realist, individualist, and pluralist strands, but only when his ethical texts are interpreted with reference to James's – often overlooked – metaphysical work.[1] This chapter aims to present an account of James's radical empiricism, defend it against some key criticisms which are relevant to my project, and elaborate a number of concepts which will be utilised in later chapters.

The structure of the chapter will be as follows: I will first present my interpretation of James's metaphysical picture of radical empiricism, with a view to its later application in the thesis (§1). Following this, I shall focus on James's theory of reference, and some of its criticisms (§2). Subsequently, I explore the connected notion that James's radical empiricism is fundamentally solipsistic (§3). In the final section, I outline James's conception of reality, explore some serious criticisms regarding how we distinguish

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[1] Most scholars think of James's metaphysical work as tangential to, or even in conflict with, his better known work in pragmatism and psychology. This thesis agrees with Putnam's assessment that the radical empiricist papers "are difficult writings, whose importance in understanding James's views cannot be overestimated" (Putnam, 1990: 232). See also Lamberth (1999) and Cooper (2002) for interpretations of James which treat his radical empiricism as central.

objective reality from subjective fantasy, and present James's resulting account of objectivity with some of its strengths (§4).

This first section presents an interpretation of James's metaphysical system. At its very simplest, radical empiricism is the attempt to present a functional and explanatory metaphysical and epistemological system by appealing only to experience. As such, radical empiricism represents the application to metaphysics of an empiricist project James explored throughout his career. There are five core parts to James's metaphysics, which I will elaborate in turn: the metaphysical thesis of "pure experience" (§1.1); the epistemological claim of "radical empiricism" (§1.2); a claim about relations (§1.3); a view about pluralism (§1.4); and an account of possibility (§1.5).

§1.1 Pure Experience

James's unique metaphysical position is that reality is fundamentally *experiential*. James calls this the thesis of "pure experience". This thesis emerged in response to two main opposing views which dominated philosophical debates in James's time. On the one hand was Absolute idealism of the sort held by his American colleague Josiah Royce, British idealists such as F. H. Bradley, and which was ultimately traceable back to Hegel. Absolute idealism was committed to the view that reality was fundamentally minded or mind-like. On the other hand, reductive materialists such as Herbert Spencer held the view that all reality was fundamentally physical. James criticised both views, and formulated his radical empiricism as a third option.

Absolute idealism was James's major opponent throughout his philosophical career. He developed a number of criticisms of it, primarily focusing on its inability to give a meaningful role to novelty, change, or chance; its privilege of generals at the experience of individuals; and its resulting incapacity to give our actions meaning and motivation.[2] James also criticised materialism, at least the reductive forms of it prevalent in his time, for leading to a kind of pessimism. Materialism necessitated the rejection of many aspects of our lives required for us to find it meaningful, such as freedom, religion and morality.[3]

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[2] See Stern and Williams (forthcoming), for more of an exploration of James' confrontation with Absolute idealism, and with Hegel in particular. See also Slater (2014) for a more detailed exploration of James's interaction with Royce and other Anglophone idealists.

[3] I will return to the insufficiency of both materialism and Absolute idealism in the final two chapters. See VI.1.2; VI.1.3; VII.1.1-3.

Given the apparent insufficiency of idealism (the view that all reality is at base mind-like) and of materialism (the view that all reality is at base physical), one available option is the adoption of a dualistic view (the view that some aspects of reality are mind-like, and some are physical). Dualisms, however, tend to create familiar problems concerning how the ontological gap which they postulate between mind and the physical world can be overcome. James, sensitive to these and other problems with dualisms, formulated radical empiricism as a rejection of dualism as well as idealism and materialism.[4]

Faced with the insufficiency of these three metaphysical views, we might be tempted to abandon the metaphysical project entirely, and reject the possibility of *any* legitimate metaphysical inquiry. However, as we have seen, James holds that it is impossible to extricate metaphysical views from either our practical or our theoretical endeavours. Our choice is not between metaphysics or no metaphysics, but between examined and unexamined metaphysical assumptions (1879, EPh: 56-7; see I.4.). Seeing as we cannot adopt idealism or materialism, we cannot adopt some dualistic combination of the two, and we cannot abstain from adopting metaphysical views, the ground is cleared for James to offer us a new metaphysical hypothesis. This hypothesis is James's thesis of pure experience.

James defines pure experience in the following ways:

> The instant field of the present is at all times what I call the "pure experience". It is only virtually or potentially either object or subject as yet. For the time being, it is plain, unqualified actuality or existence, a simple *that* (1904, ERE: 13).

> "Pure experience" is the name which I [give] to the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories. Only new-born babes, or men in semicoma from sleep, drugs, illnesses, or blows, may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense of a *that* which is not yet any definite *what*, tho ready to be all sorts of whats; full both of oneness and of manyness […] Pure experience in this state is but another name for feeling or sensation (1905, ERE: 46).

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[4] As James puts it in no uncertain terms in his notes on the unpublished *The Many and the One* (1903-4):

> I am convinced, in short, that the whole notion of an original dualism of any kind is false. Consciousness and content are not distinct ingredients constituent of any experience whatever. […] There is no such entity as consciousness, as thought-stuff, and there is no such entity as thing-stuff, either separable or inseparably combined. There is only one original Stuff, and that is the undivided stuff of what I shall call "pure" experience (1903-4, MEN: 24-25).

The epistemological results such a denial of "consciousness" will be seen in the next section (§2.1).

Reality is not fundamentally mental or physical, but is *experiential*. "Pure experience", on this hypothesis, is the "one primal stuff" of reality (1904, ERE: 4).[5]

The originality of this proposition might mean that it strikes us immediately as sounding fantastical. But, at least *prima facie*, this position is no more or less odd than making the more familiar claims that the world is fundamentally physical, or fundamentally psychical. And James thought that seeing the fundamental stuff of reality as experiential actually led to significantly fewer problems than traditionally accepted metaphysical hypotheses.

There are several important features to draw out of this notion of pure experience. The first is that the notion of "experience" has an ambiguity which means it is prior to its division into either object or subject. As James puts it is his *Many and One* notes:

> By the adjective "pure" prefixed to the word "experience," I mean to denote a form of being which is as yet neutral or ambiguous, and prior to the object and subject distinction (1903-4, MEN: 26-27).

As such, it is in an important sense *between* the idealistic and materialistic positions. It accepts that reality is capable of being both mind-like *and* being physical, without becoming a dualism. It is in this sense that James's pure experience thesis emerges as a kind of "neutral monism" (1905, ERE: 268).[6]

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[5] James later reneges somewhat on this claim. He tells us that though "for fluency's sake" he spoke of the "stuff of pure experience", in fact there is "no *general* stuff of which experience at large is made. There are as many stuffs as there are 'natures' in the things experienced" (1904, ERE: 15). James's claim here is essentially the pluralistic claim that there is no necessary common content between different experiences. I have already dealt with this claim in the previous chapter (III.2.2).

[6] We can see this neutrality appearing as early as the early 1880s. In notes on "Idealism", James describes the nature of phenomena as a "neutral experience":

> I should say the *rudiment* of thought was always of an object in the logical sense, but in the material sense of something in which the discrimination of sub- & object had not yet been affected, a neutral experience, a phenomenon […] originally vague, but gradually elaborating itself by separation and accretion until *inter alia* the notions of inward & outward or subject and object materially considered, had been evolved (1880-1884, MEN: 183).

Bertrand Russell went on to develop a theory of "neutral monism" which was influenced by James's theory of pure experience. Here is how he expresses the theory:

> The stuff of which the world of our pure experience is composed is […] neither mind nor matter, but something more primitive than either. Both mind and matter seem to be composite, and the stuff of which they are compounded lies in a sense between the two, and in a sense above them both like a common ancestor (B. Russell, 1921: 10-11).

This means that there is no ontological gulf between our mental lives and physical matter. Both can be described in terms of persistent "streams" of pure experience:

> On the principles which I am defending, a "mind" or "personal consciousness" is the name for a series of experience run together by certain definite transitions, and an objective reality is a series of similar experiences, knit by different transitions (1904, ERE: 39).[7]

There is also no "aboriginal stuff or quality of being" – no ontological feature – that determines how "mind" comes to be contrasted with "matter" (1904, ERE: 4). The differentiation between mind and matter emerges *out* of experience, not on the basis of an ontological but a functional distinction. As James puts it in his *Many and One* notes, matter and thought

> are names of *functions* which experiences in their undivided wholeness may enter into & fulfil, of opposite spheres of relation in which they may get mutually involved (1903-4, MEN: 24-5).

Taken as an object in the world, and in relation with other objects, the experienced object is a physical object. When I *think* of this object, the very same experience is taken in a different context, in relation with my interests, memories, and personal biography, and as a result taken as a thought (1905, ERE: 271). We'll say more about the nature of this division later (§4).

The second thing to draw out of James's notion of "pure experience" is that it is an impersonal notion, without being removed entirely from all personal experience. When James talks about "pure experience", he means experience as it is before we apply our practical interests, conceptual reflections, and personal histories to it. By applying these narrowing features, we focus in, interpret, and contextualise the originary experience so that it is no longer "pure", but is now *my* experience. Pure experience itself does not *belong* to anyone, but is the immediate "stuff" from which we build our personal experiences. It is this James means when he tells us that only babies or mentally impaired adults can approach "pure" experience. Many of James's contemporaries assumed that by "pure experience" James meant "my immediate experience", and so accused him of solipsism. Much of the rest of this chapter will be devoted to denying that radical empiricism is solipsistic in this sense.

See Banks (2014) for a detailed examination of Russell's neutral monism and its connection to James, as well as the influence of Ernst Mach on both thinkers. According to Madden (1954), James's neutral monism was (in some ways) also an inheritance from Chauncey Wright.

[7] See Sprigge (1993: 120-137) for the various ways to interpret James's claims about mind-independent physical reality on the radical empiricist framework, and their various complications. I will return to the notion of objective reality under the radical empiricist framework below (§4.3).

James might have simply asserted, as other neutral monists do, that there is some neutral "stuff", without making the substantive and potentially problematic claim that this "stuff" is experiential.[8] We can consider three important reasons for James's substantive claim. Firstly, when looking for something with which we are acquainted that already demonstrates a neutrality between subjective and objective features of reality, experience might be an intuitive choice, as by definition it exists *between* a subject and its object. Secondly, James's criticism of both materialism and idealism focused on the fact that those theses alienated us from reality. Some forms of idealism (for instance, James's interpretation of Kantian idealism) held that true reality was beyond our understanding, others (for instance, James's interpretation of Hegelian idealism) held that reality was fundamentally conceptual, and so removed from our practical excitements and interests, and materialism held that reality was completely alien from the values which gave our lives meaning. By giving "experience" ontological priority, James is avoiding the alienation which these other metaphysical accounts threaten, by making something which we are all intimately familiar with the fundamental stuff of reality.[9] Thirdly, this metaphysical thesis has connections with James's methodological and epistemological commitments, as we shall go on to see.[10]

It is unclear exactly how long James held his thesis of pure experience for. It appears prominently in his two 1904 papers "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" and "A World of Pure Experience", but James's subsequent metaphysical work rarely refers to it. It is also unclear how the idea that reality is fundamentally experiential, and so neutral between materialism and idealism, connects with James's apparent move towards an idealistic panpsychism in his later work.[11] Nonetheless, James's later articulations of radical

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[8] In what appear to be earlier explorations of a similar idea, James adopts the word "datum" as providing the neutral role:

> There *is* no stuff anywhere but data. The entire world (obj. & subjective) at any actual time is a datum. Only within that datum there are two parts, the ob. and the subjective parts, seen retrospectively (1895-96, ML: 219).

In a margin note a little later, James expresses the intention to "use the word 'field' here for 'datum' – it is conveniently ambiguous" (1895-96, ML: 220n10). "Field" was already a word James used to apply to consciousness, so this change represents a natural move towards the "pure experience" thesis.

[9] See VII.1

[10] In his notes for "Philosophy 9: Metaphysics" (1904-5), James suggests that there are four advantages to taking experience as the primary metaphysical term: i) neutrality (between subject and object); ii) concreteness (we are aware of experience in a way we are not of "matter" or "thought"); iii) pragmatic usefulness (as it connects with the pragmatist theory of truth as working within experience); and iv) inclusiveness (experience is inclusive in a way that matter or mind is not) (1904-5, ML: 331).

[11] See 1902-3, ML: 268; 1903, ECR: 544; 1909, PU: 141; 1909, EPR: 374; and 1909, EPs: 374, for James's apparent endorsement of a pluralistic form of panpsychism. Kuklick (1977: 325); Ford (1981; 1982:

empiricism still implicitly involve the thesis that there is: i) some fundamental stuff or stuffs which are; ii) neutral between thing and subject; iii) experiential and; iv) impersonal but; v) not wholly removed from personal experience. These are the important features of pure experience to keep in mind for the purposes of this thesis.

§1.2 RADICAL EMPIRICISM

Fundamentally, James's radical empiricism expresses two connected propositions: that everything which is real must be experienceable, and that everything which is experienceable is by that fact real (1904, ERE: 22; 1905, ERE: 81). Interpreted metaphysically, these propositions express something very like the thesis of pure experience. Interpreted as a methodological postulate, radical empiricism asserts the common empirical proposal that our philosophical theories should appeal to nothing but experiential entities. We can know nothing, and can have no evidence for the truth of a concept or proposition, outside of actual or possible experience. The main difference between this "radical" empiricism and more conventional empiricisms concerns the breadth of what counts as experience, as we shall see in the next section.[12]

Radical empiricism is an easy companion to James's pragmatism, which holds that to fully understand a concept one must be able to delimit the practical results which would follow from it being true. Despite his official assertion that radical empiricism (as a philosophical doctrine) and pragmatism (as a method of philosophy) were separable,

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77-84); Gale (1999: 273-302); and Sprigge (1993: 134-137; 171) all agree that James was a panpsychist, and that this conflicts with a neutral monist reading of radical empiricism. I think that the easiest solution to unite James's panpsychism and his neutral monism is the one offered by Cooper (2002). Cooper holds that "pure experience" is neutral between mind and matter, but that the neutral monist must concede that pure experience contains more psychical, or "protomental" features than physical ones (Cooper, 2002: 38; 61; 64). These protomental features of pure experience include changingness, continuity, and a "nonpersonal notion of purposiveness" (Cooper, 2002: 71). As Ford emphases, even if we accept James was a panpsychist (and so an idealist in one sense), this still does not prevent him from being an epistemological or metaphysical realist in the sense relevant to this thesis (Ford, 1981: 168).

[12] I am offering a non-nominalistic interpretation of radical empiricism, such that reality is defined in terms of its *capacity* to be experienced, rather than by its *actually* being experienced. This is not uncontentious. Several scholars interpret James's radical empiricism nominalistically (e.g. Cooper, 2002; Banks, 2014: 5; Sprigge: 112-113; 120-137; 224-228). According to Perry (1935, 2: 666) which interpretation is correct is undecided, and perhaps undecidable. I hope to show the legitimacy of my interpretation by arguing against solipsism throughout this chapter. As James puts it in his Miller-Bode notebooks: "'Being,' pragmatically considered, means only the condition prerequisite to anything becoming experienced" (1908, MEN: 97; 1908, ML: 442; §1.5).

James does connect the concepts of radical empiricism and pragmatism.[13] Radical empiricism seems to involve the pragmatist maxim, which James describes in a radical empiricist context as "the postulate that there is no difference in truth that doesn't make a difference of fact somewhere" (1905, ERE: 81; see 1907, P: 30), and we are told in the preface to *The Meaning of Truth* that the pragmatist account of truth is intimately linked with radical empiricism (1909, MT: 6). Radical empiricism goes further than pragmatism, however, with the inclusion of the metaphysical assertion that if we cannot experience what a concept refers us to, either directly or indirectly, then that concept refers to nothing real. Non-experiential entities can have no impact on us, and we can gain no knowledge of them. As such, we should not refer to them or rely on them at all in our philosophical theories.

What kinds of entities does radical empiricism rule out through this rejection of non-experiential entities? James is happy to allow for "imperceptibles", such as those which chemical or physical sciences postulate, so long as their postulation has practical and experiential consequences (1904, ERE: 41). However, entities which are by their nature necessarily non- or trans-experiential are rejected from our philosophical cannon. The transcendental ego, for instance, is held to be a transcendental requirement for experience, and cannot itself be experienced, and so is rejected under radical empiricism. The Absolute, as that entity which comprehends and unifies everything within our finite world, cannot be experienced, and is likewise rejected as unreal on radical empiricism (1904, ERE: 26). Consciousness, taken as some occult and wholly subjective property of our being, is rejected, as it can never be experienced (1904, ERE: 1ff).

§1.3 Real Relations

Of course, philosophers have not been importing trans-experiential entities into their philosophies for no good reason. Typically, they are introduced in order to provide explanations for features of reality which cannot be accounted for using only experiential

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[13] In the preface to *Pragmatism*, James asserts that there is no

> logical connexion between pragmatism, as I understand it, and a doctrine which
> I have recently set forth as "radical empiricism". The latter stands on its own feet.
> One may entirely reject it and still be a pragmatist (1907, P: 6).

See Cooper (1999: 374-378) for an exploration of how the two theories connect.

or empirical terminology. James diagnoses the need to postulate such non-experiential entities as a result of a narrow and inaccurate account of experience.

Both rationalists and classical empiricists make the same mistake when they assume that experience is fundamentally dis-unified and atomistic. Assuming that experience is dis-unified, and has no resources for its own unification, classical empiricists introduce conventional habits of association to provide this unity, and idealists introduce trans-experiential agencies (the transcendental ego in Kant, "the Absolute" in certain forms of absolute idealism) (1904, ERE: 22-23). According to James, these "fictitious agencies of union" are brought in only because these theorists do not allow the unities *within* experience to stand for themselves. Immediate experience contains both elements of dis-unity *and* elements of unity, and we have no reason to assume that one requires explanation any more than the other. As such, we should either introduce agencies of *dis*-unity as well as agencies of union, or we should allow the discontinuity and continuity of experience to have equal ontological standing (1904, ERE: 26-7).[14]

The notion of experience which radical empiricism entertains is much richer than that of classical empiricism. The "principal effort of the Humean school" of empiricism, according to James, has been to "abrogate relations, not only from the sphere of reality, but from the sphere of consciousness" (1884, EPs: 145). Radical empiricism reverses this trend in empiricism. It is precisely this which makes James's empiricism *radical*:

> [Radical empiricism] *does full justice to conjunctive relations*, without, however, treating them as rationalism always tends to treat them, as being true in some supernal way, as if the unity of things and their variety belonged to different orders of truth and vitality altogether (1904, ERE: 23).

Conjunctive as well as disjunctive relations are as much a part of experience as those terms which they relate, and so, under radical empiricism, are just as real.[15]

Postulating the reality of both the conjunctive and disjunctive relations in experience, radical empiricism does not require the work of trans-experiential entities to unify experience. Experience already contains the real relations which (incompletely) unify it. James calls the unity which emerges from this account *concatenated* union, which he opposes to the more monistic type of union demonstrated by absolute idealisms:

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[14] See I.6.1

[15] For a nuanced account of how James's "radical empiricism" relates to, and rejects the atomistic assumptions of, traditional empiricism, see Bird (1986: 66-77). Also, see Madden and Madden (1978) for a detailed exploration of James's arguments against three standard empiricist conceptions of relations, and *for* "the view that relations are introspectively and ontologically irreducible" (1978: 242); and Klein (2009, 428-448) for James's reformation of traditional empiricism's views on (spatial) relations to avoid idealist criticisms.

> Radical empiricism takes conjunctive relations at their face-value, holding them to be as real as the terms united by them. The world it represents is a collection, some parts of which are conjunctively and others disjunctively related. Two parts, themselves disjoined, may nevertheless hang together by intermediaries with which they are severally connected, and the whole world eventually may hang together similarly, inasmuch as *some* path of conjunctive transition by which to pass from one of its parts to another may always be discernible. Such determinately various hanging-together may be called *concatenated* union, to distinguish it from the "through-and-through" type of union, "each in all and all in each" (union of *total conflux*, as one might call it), which monistic systems hold to obtain when things are taken in their absolute reality (1905, ERE: 52).

By arguing that experience can *self*-unify through conjunctive relations which are themselves experiential, James is aiming to remove one of the prevalent philosophical needs to invoke non-experiential entities.

With these three elements, we can arrive at a full description of radical empiricism:

> To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, *the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as "real" as anything else in the system* (1904, ERE: 22).

Returning to radical empiricism in the preface to the *Meaning of Truth* (1909), James presents it as being made up of these three elements: a postulate, a statement of fact, and a generalised conclusion. The postulate is that the only things "debateable among philosophers" should be elements "drawn from experience". The statement of fact is that conjunctive and disjunctive relations are just as much features of experience as the things related. And the general conclusion is that the parts of experience hang together "from next to next" by these very relations. As such the "directly apprehended universe", at least, needs no "extraneous trans-empirical connected support" but demonstrates its own "concatenated or continuous structure" (1909, MT: 6-7). We should think of these three elements as the most vital features of James's radical empiricism.

§1.4 PLURALISM

As we've seen, throughout his philosophical career James took absolute idealism to be his major opponent, and he contrasted his own metaphysical picture with this view in a number of ways. The most important of these, for James, was probably the distinction between the monism of absolute idealism, and the pluralism which radical empiricism allowed for. He considered the difference between monism and pluralism to be "the most pregnant of all the dilemmas of philosophy" (1910, SPP: 61).[16]

The key to this pluralism is the "concatenated" type of union which radical empiricism postulates. Both concatenated and "conflux" union are theories of continuity.[17] But whereas the conflux union of the monistic idealists presented a reality (according to James) in which *everything* was connected to everything else, the concatenated union of radical empiricism allows for this union to be less complete. According to radical empiricism, the universe demonstrates a "mosaic" like form of unification, if in a mosaic "the pieces clung together by their edges, the transitions experienced between them forming their cement" (1904, ERE: 42). Though every object of experience is continuous with its immediate neighbours, it is not the case that every object is connected with every other object. (1903-1904, MEN: 48-9; 1909, PU: 115). This vision is perhaps best presented by James at the end of *A Pluralistic Universe*:

> Our "multiverse" still makes a "universe"; for every part, tho it may not be in actual or immediate connexion, is nevertheless in some possible or mediated connexion, with every other part however remote, through the fact that each part with its very next neighbors is in inextricable interfusion. The type of union, it is true, is different here from the monistic type of *alleinheit*. It is not a universal co-implication, or integration of all things *durcheinander*. It is what I call the strung-along type, the type of continuity, contiguity, or concatenation. If you prefer greek words, you may call it the synechistic type. At all events, you see that it forms a definitely conceivable alternative to the through-and-through unity of all things at once, which is the type opposed to it by monism. You see also that it stands or falls with the notion I have taken such pains to defend, of the through-and-through union of adjacent minima of experience, of the confluence of every passing moment of concretely felt experience with its immediately next neighbors (1909, PU: 146-147).

As well as solving the various problems he associates with monism, there are several important practical results which stem from seeing the universe as pluralistic. James

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[16] See Slater (2011: 65-75) for a detailed exploration of how James's general pluralism and his radical empiricism are related.

[17] It will be recalled that the pragmat(ic)ist must be a realist about continuity (I.6).

offers us a partial list of these in his notes for "Philosophy 9: Metaphysics" (1905-6). There he suggests that the concatenated and pluralistic notion of union: frees us from unnecessary abstractions; restores to philosophy a scientific and practical temper; allows there to be progress; allows *us* to be potential factors of that progress; "frankly interprets the universe after a *social* analogy; and allows for the reality of chance or novelty" (1905-6, MT: 367).

By understanding the universe under a social analogy, James means conceiving it *democratically*, as a "pluralism of independent powers", in which progress will succeed only if each power does their part (1906-7, ML: 418).[18] This democratic and melioristic vision is meant to differ fundamentally from idealism's picture of a single organism or mind self-perfecting. James makes this analogy clear in the following passage:

> Things are "with" one another in many ways, but nothing includes everything, or dominates over everything. The word "and" trails along after every sentence. Something always escapes. "Ever not quite" has to be said of the best attempts made anywhere in the universe at attaining all-inclusiveness. The pluralistic world is thus more like a federal republic than like an empire or a kingdom. However much may be collected, however much may report itself as present at any effective centre of consciousness or action, something else is self-governed and absent and unreduced to unity (1909, PU: 145).

Pluralism, then, allows for creativity, novelty, and growth to be true forces in the universe, and allows our own decisions and actions to make some contribution to the overall make-up of the universe. These are the reasons James finds his metaphysical hypothesis to be practically and morally superior to absolute idealism.[19]

§1.5 Chance and Possibility

James frequently connects his pluralism and his radical empiricism with a realism about chance and possibility (e.g. 1884, WB: 137; 1897, WB: 6). As he puts it in a letter to the French philosopher François Pillon:

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[18] See Lamberth (1997) for an extended interpretation of James's metaphysics in light of his "social analogy" comment.

[19] The importance of allowing us to be factors in the improvement of the world will be returned to in the final chapter (VII.1). See (1882, WB: 201) for an earlier instance of this pluralistic view being levelled against the non-democratic Hegelian account.

> My philosophy is what I call a radical empiricism, a pluralism, a "tychism," which represents order as being gradually won and always in the making (1904, CWJ10: 410).

James borrows Peirce's word for realism about chance here, "tychism" (cf. 1891, CP6.7-34; 1892, CP6.35-65).[20] Tychism in James's case means realism about indeterminacy, such that multiple different outcomes are consistent with the same previous states of affairs. According to James, real indeterminacy is required in order to make sense of freedom, moral phenomena such as regret, and for our actions and decisions to make meaningful contributions to the betterment of the world (see VI.1.2; VII.1).

Though James was often satisfied with the assertion of bare indeterminacy in his published works, we can find in the unpublished *The Many and the One* (1903-4) a more technical concept of possibility. There James makes a distinction between something which is possible in the sense of being abstractly possible (in the simple sense of being non-contradictory) and something which is possible in the sense of certain to occur in future experience. The latter type of possibility is what James calls "virtuality":

> When an event that is not yet actual is nevertheless *certain* to *occur* in future, it is more than a bare possibility. We speak of its enjoying even now a *virtual or potential existence* (1903-4, MEN: 35).

Pragmatically speaking, something is virtual when its possibility is "grounded" in the facts of our experience such that the events or objects which necessarily precipitate the existence of the possible event are present, and nothing stands in the way of it being brought about. A "bare possibility", on the other hand, "floats in our mind loosely with no associates in fact" (1903-4, MEN: 36). In James's typically practical example, he tells us that:

> [a] virtual chicken, for example, means nothing but an actual egg, with a sufficient supply of warmth in sight, and no quarter visible from which refrigeration or breakage is likely to come (1903-4, MEN: 36).[21]

Different states of possibility require different practical conduct. An impossible thing requires no conduct at all, a virtual thing requires that we prepare for its arrival, and a possible thing requires our voluntary action if we are to bring about its existence (1903-4, MEN: 36).

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[20] He also attributes this position to Bergson, with whom he thought he was "fighting the same fight [… of] rescuing tychism" (letter to Bergson, 1907, CWJ11: 377). According to James Bergson's *denvenir réel* and Peirce's tychism were "practically synonymous" (1909, PU: 153). Unsurprisingly, Peirce objected to the comparison (cf. 1909 letters presented in Perry, 1935, 2: 437-40). See Hare (1979: xxix-xxxi) for an outline of James's position of tychism, and Dea (2015) for more on the exchange between James and Peirce on the topic.
[21] See also 1907, P: 136

This distinction between merely possible and virtually certain is too simple. In fact, James suggests that there are degrees of possibility, such that something becomes *more* probable or virtually existent the more "grounded" it becomes in the world of actual fact (1903-4, MEN: 36). As he puts it in *Some Problems*, something is "*probable* just in proportion as the said conditions [for existence] are numerous" (1910, SPP: 114).

In the *Many and the One* notes, James uses his notion of virtuality to avoid two problematic conclusions which would otherwise follow from his thesis of pure experience. If to be is to be experienc*ed*, then it would seem as if James were obliged to hold the nominalistic position that the patterns, similarities, patterns, and relations which obtain between the objects of our experience did not exist prior to our experience of them. But this, obviously,

> violates our instinct of truth, for we feel that in all such cases the facts which we experience and name have pre-existed to our act of naming them. We feel ourselves to be finders of truth, not creators of it for the first time (1903-4, MEN: 37).

In attempting to avoid *this* problematic conclusion, we might fall into a second, and postulate the existence of a knower in whose experience all relations are currently known and felt. But this would force James to adopt absolute idealism, and all its consequent problems.[22]

The concept of virtuality saves James from both problems. It allows the radical empiricist to say that the relations that we discover were "slumberingly, latently, potentially, implicitly, or virtually [there] before they were expressly recognized" (1903-4, MEN: 37). In many cases the relations which obtain between experiences are potentially or virtually existent, even if they are not actually experienced by anyone. As such, the radical empiricist can maintain the common-sense view that truth pre-exists its discovery without abandoning their commitment to experiential descriptions. As James puts it in *The Meaning of Truth*:

> The truth of an event, past, present, or future, is for me only another name for the fact that if the event ever does get known, the nature of the knowledge is already to some degree predetermined (1909, MT: 157).

Even if it *were* never experienced, the truths that we could discover about any object or event are "already genetically predetermined by the event's nature" and we can thus

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[22] As we shall see, James actually makes precisely this mistake in his ethics by postulating the existence of a God in whose experience competing demands are actually organised (VI.4).

"say with a perfectly good conscience that it virtually pre-exists" (1909, MT: 155). We shall see exactly what the nature of truth is on James's system in the next section.[23]

With these five major features, we have a basic vision of James's metaphysics. I turn now to defending this basic vision against some of its classic criticisms, fleshing out James's system in the process.

§2. REFERENCE

In this section I will focus in more detail on one aspect of James's theory of radical empiricism: his notion of reference. First, I will present an interpretation of James's pragmatic theory of reference (§2.1); second, I will link this theory to older ideas about transitional relations and the "fringe" (§2.2); and thirdly, I will use this understanding to answer a traditional criticism of James's radical empiricism (§2.3). In later chapters, I will appeal to this notion of reference to do substantive ethical work.

§2.1 COGNITIVE RELATIONS

Part of the strength of radical empiricism, according to James, is that it can give a non-mysterious account of how our thoughts refer to objects in the world. Rather than gesturing to some "self-transcending" property of thought, as he took his rationalist contemporaries to do, or indicating that thoughts "copy" or "correspond" to the world in some ill-defined way, radical empiricism cashes out reference in terms of concrete experience. It does this in two ways.

Firstly, radical empiricism denies the ontological difference between the object of thought and the thought of the object. Because the thesis of pure experience holds that the fundamental stuff of reality is neutral between physical and psychical, the same portion of experience can be taken as physical or psychical depending on context (1904, ERE: 10; 39). This means that the experience taken as thought (henceforth *experience-as-thought*) and the experience taken as a physical object (henceforth *experience-as-object*) can be identical. The distinction between thought and object then becomes a functional

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[23] With his concept of virtuality, James is free to accept the subjunctive, rather than indicative, interpretation of the pragmatic maxim (I.6.3).

distinction, rather than an ontological one. This is meant to result in the gap between mind and world being dissolved, and the referring capacity of thought being rendered less mysterious. A correct thought is identical with the object thought of.

Secondly, radical empiricism gives an account of reference in terms of felt experience. According to the radical empiricist model, reference is a kind of "leading-towards" (1904, ERE: 14). A thought "knows", "means", or "refers to" its object when it is connected to its object by experiential relations. If I am thinking of the book which I need in another room, my thought of that book is connected via potential experiential relations (the book is on my desk, in that room, under three other books, which I can access if I walk in that direction, etc.) to the physical book. Because of, and through, these experiential and practical relations, my thought can "lead me" to the book. If it cannot (if I reach my study and cannot identify the book in question) then my thought did not "know", "mean", or "refer" to the book after all. Knowledge, under radical empiricism, is an experiential relation like any other. The thought known and the object which it knows are linked together by actual or potential relational experiences (1904, ERE: 4).

This knowledge relation can have at least three different shapes. In *perception,* we usually have a direct acquaintance with our object. In such cases, our thought of the object (the experience-as-thought, as it functions in relation with our mental processes, personal histories, and so on) and the object itself (the experience-as-object, as it functions as a physical object in relation with other physical objects) are *identical*. Only in reflection can we separate the subject and the object of this perception, and suggest that I have a thought which knows an object. When we separate experience-as-thought and experience-as-object in this way, we are taking that "*self-same piece of experience* [...] twice over in different contexts" (1904, ERE: 27, emphasis mine).[24]

The second type of cognitive relation is "knowledge about", which James calls the "simplest sort of conceptual knowledge". This simple conceptual knowledge involves my having an idea about some object which is not directly present to me. The conjunctive relation obtains if there are "definite tracts of conjunctive transitional experience" between my idea of the object (experience-as-thought) and the object itself (experience as object). In the simplest case, this means my idea knows the object that it is an idea *of*, if it would lead me, through experiential relations, to a direct acquaintance with that object (1904, ERE: 27-28). More complex conceptual knowledge relations might preclude direct acquaintance with the object itself, but my idea will instead be able to predict observable behaviours of the object, tell us its actual and possible relations to other objects, be able to recognise it as an instance of a class of objects, and so on.

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[24] As James's puts it in "The Notion of Consciousness": "[t]he external and the internal, the extended and the not extended fuse and make an indissoluble marriage" (1905, ERE: 256).

The third possible type of cognitive relation, which we can call *potential* or *virtual* knowledge, is a case in which "the known is a possible experience either of that subject or another, to which the said conjunctive transitions *would* lead, if sufficiently prolonged" (1904, ERE: 27). Virtual knowledge obtains when someone has an idea which *could* or *would* lead me to a verification experience, but these transitive relations are not actually followed, and they remain merely potential. In actual fact, James holds that most cases of knowledge are virtual relations of this sort, because we rarely individually verify every proposition we hold to be true. As James puts it, "[t]ruth lives […] for the most part on a credit system" (1907, P: 100).[25] We tend to hold them to be true if we have them on good authority, or as long as our experience does not contradict them. But they are virtually true if *were* we to test them, they *would* prove to lead us to a verification experience (§1.5).

James demonstrates this account of experiential cognitive relations in his famous example of the Memorial Hall. Thinking of the Hall, some ten minutes from his office, James holds an image of it in his mind. The actual image, it's resemblance or not to the Hall, is more or less irrelevant to the cognitive relation. Rather, "[c]ertain *extrinsic* phenomena, special experiences of conjunction, are what impart to the image [...] its knowing office" (1904, ERE: 28). That James's thought of the Hall can practically lead him to a direct experience of that object is what we mean by saying that his thought *meant* or *referred* to the Hall:

> For instance, if you ask me what hall I mean by my image, and I can tell you nothing; or if I fail to point or lead you towards [it] […]; or if, being led by you, I am uncertain whether the Hall I see be what I had in mind or not; you would rightly deny that I had "meant" that particular hall at all […]. On the other hand, if I can lead you to the hall, and tell you of its history and present uses; if in its presence I feel my idea, however imperfect it may have been, to have led hither and to be now *terminated*; if the associates of the image and of the felt hall run parallel, so that each term of the one context corresponds serially, as I walk, with an answering term of the other, why then […] my idea must be […] cognizant of reality. That percept was what I *meant*, for into it my idea has passed by conjunctive experiences of sameness and fulfilled intention (1904, ERE: 28).[26]

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[25] Elsewhere, James expresses that "nine-tenths of the time [truths] are not actually but only virtually there" (1904, ERE: 35; see 1909, MT: 68).

[26] In a more colourful example, James suggests that his idea of his terrier is cognitive of the real terrier in the sense that:

> the actual tissue of experience is so constituted [so that] the idea is capable of leading into a chain of other experiences on my part that go from next to next and terminate at last in vivid sense-perceptions of a jumping, barking, hairy

The deceptively simple aim James has in presenting this view is to make more concrete and un-mysterious the claim that my idea "represents" or "knows" reality. The way he does so is the suggestion that a correct idea leads us towards a practical experience with reality, and that these "leadings" are themselves conjunctive relations of experience. In the Memorial Hall case, and those similar, the conjunctive relations terminate in the experience-as-thought and the experience-as-object being recognised as identical.[27]

§2.2. The "Fringe" and Felt Relations

Perhaps surprisingly, James appeared to hold some form of this theory of reference from very early in his career. Though there is no sign of the thesis that thought and object are identical, the idea that felt relations were vital to cognition was present as early as "On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology" (1884), and later in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). Running through the earlier accounts of relations and their cognitive function will help us understand James's later position.

In 1884, James mentions two fallacies which he diagnoses in contemporary psychology. The first is the refusal to admit the reality, and the importance, of what he calls the "transitive" parts of experience, and a focus on the "substantive" parts. The second fallacy is ignoring the cognitive function of these relational, transitive parts of felt experience. James talks about the "substantive" points of consciousness as "resting points" as "conclusions", as "images" or as "terms". The "transitive" parts of the stream of consciousness are the relations between these substantive points. They include expectations of future experience, connection to past experience, and other feelings of

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body. Those are the real dog, the dog's full presence, for my common sense (1905, ERE: 101).

See also 1909, MT: 74.

[27] As Jackman (1998) points out, such an account of reference is quite revisionary in the sense that it makes the "truth of our thoughts and utterances, even of those that are about the *past* […] sensitive both to our interests and to how our inquiries go in the *future*" (Jackman, 1998: 155). James's future oriented account of reference is to be contrasted with both resemblance accounts, which hold that the referent of our thought is determined by our thought's resemblance to that referent, and with causal accounts, which hold that reference is to be explained through an account of the causal chain of events which lead to us having that idea (ibid: 159-160). Jackman interprets James's various statements regarding subjective interest's contribution to the outcome of inquiry as the position that the experiences and decisions throughout the process of inquiry help to determine the referent of our initially vague idea (ibid: 171-172). See I.5 for more on vagueness and pragmatism, and chapter VII for more on how our subjective interests can be seen to contribute to what is true.

continuity and discontinuity. "[O]ur mental life", James tells us, "like a bird's life, seems to be made of an alteration of flights and perchings". The "perches" in this metaphor are the substantive features of experience, and the "flights" are the transitive parts (1884, EPs 143-4).

The first fallacy leads us to adopt a kind of atomistic, blocky version of consciousness, where all we can talk about are "images, *Vorstellungen*, or ideas". We end with a kind of Humean nominalism, or a kind Platonic idealism, and associated problems. The second fallacy, failing to see the cognitive importance of these transitive parts of experience, follows from the first. It leads us to have to postulate odd sounding principles and substances to explain how these atomistic ideas represent a world outside of them (1884, EPs: 144-5).[28]

James, on the other hand, accords to these transitive elements of experience both reality and an irreducible cognitive role. According to James, the felt relations between the substantive points of our experience are vital for the knowing the real, objective relations which obtain between them. According to James, "a peculiar modification of our subjective feeling corresponds to our awareness of each objective relation, and is the condition of its being known". James is not precise, at this early stage, regarding the cognitive role of the feeling of relation. He just asserts that "if any objective truth whatever can come to be known during, and through the instrumentality of, a feeling, there seems to be no *a priori* reason why a relation should not be that truth". Our feelings regarding how the substantive portions of experience are related are at least one way of knowing those relations. These relations should not be thought of as limited to feelings of likeness, space, or sequence in time. In fact, our felt relations are "numberless" and there is "no existing language [...] capable of doing justice to all their shades". Just as we recognise feelings of cold, and sensations of blue (substantive parts of experience), we should talk about "a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, a feeling of *by*" (1884, EPs: 145-6). According felt relations a cognitive role is an early version of an account that blossoms into his radical empiricist theory of reference.[29]

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[28] Nearly 20 years later, in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), James expresses his happiness that:

> at present psychologists are tending, first, to admit that the actual unit [of mental life] is more probably the total mental state, the entire wave of consciousness or field of objects present to the thought at any time; and, second, to see that it is impossible to outline this wave, this field, with any definiteness (1902, VRE: 189).

This would indicate that, in James's opinion, psychology was moving past the first fallacy at least.
[29] Under radical empiricism we do not have to explain why our feelings of relation x are cognitive of the objective relation x, seeing as the objective relation *is* experiential, and so capable of being felt.

Part of the reason that James focused on these transitive and relational parts of experience was to reject the Humean atomism which he took to dominate psychology at the time.[30] In contrast, James argues, primarily through phenomenological appeal, that experience as we encounter it actually comes in complex "pulses" rather than in discrete atomistic units. These pulses have no definite boundaries, and co-mingle and relate with later pulses (1884, EPs: 152). James also talks about "waves" and "fields" of experience in this regard, with a field of consciousness, like a field of vision, having a more or less definite centre of focus (the substantive part), and a less definite "more" which surrounds this centre and points to other objects and experiences (the transitive portions). We'll return to this field metaphor in detail below.

One of the prominent reasons that scientific psychology had failed to acknowledge these transitive elements before James is that they are impossible to grasp definitely. Unlike the substantive elements, which are the conclusions, terms, and objects of our experience, the transitive elements are movements from one substantive element to another. As James puts it,

> The rush of thought is so headlong that it almost always brings us up at the conclusion before we can arrest it. Or if our purpose is nimble enough and we do arrest it, it ceases forthwith to be itself. As a snowflake caught in the warm hand is no longer a flake but a drop, so, instead of catching the feeling of relation moving to its term, we find we have caught some substantive thing, usually the last word we were pronouncing, statically taken, and with its function, tendency and particular meaning in the sentence quite evaporated (1884, EPs: 144)

James here points to three features of the transitive properties of experience that he fears are ignored when psychology focuses solely on the substantive parts. The first is "function", the instrumental role that relations play in allowing us to perform various activities, including cognition. The second is "tendency", or what we will come to see as the indexical or "pointing" nature of these relations. Thirdly, arresting a stream of experience to grasp at one element tends to lose the particular meaning that a term has within the context of that stream. If we do try to remove transitive portions of experience from the sensible flow, we render them *substantive*, and so annihilate the meaning and function they actually have within the stream. It is the psychologist's fallacy to treat the experiential stream as if it were *really* made up of such substantive elements, just because this is the only way we can treat and deal with them (EPs: 1884, 166).[31]

Taking these transitive elements to be an irreducible part of any experience means that each experience is unique. Transitive features include anticipations of future

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[30] See §1.3; I.6.1.

[31] James will return to this concern when he distinguishes between the "dynamic" and the "static" meaning of a term (1890, PP1: 255). See below.

experiences, relations to past experience, and myriad other relations with other portions of experience. There is no possibility of repeating any experience, because the second experience will have relational features which the first did not. At the very least, the second experience of the same object will have a relation to the first experience, and the third experience a relation to the first and second, and so the experience of the same term will not be identical due to the multiplication of these identifying relations. This is what James means when he tells us

> [t]here is no reason to suppose that the same feeling ever does or can recur again. The same *thing* may recur and be known in an indefinite number of successive feelings, but does the least proof exist that in any two of them it is represented in an identical subjective state? (1884, EPs: 152).[32]

This view regarding the uniqueness of every experience will cause James's later radical empiricism some serious problems (§3).

The transitional parts of experience are responsible for our sense of continuity or discontinuity. In many ways, this can be connected to the pragmatist notion of inquiry. Whilst everything is going well, successive experiences appear to continue previous ones. Our anticipations about the future are confirmed, and the continuation from past experiences is unbroken. We get the sense that everything is "all right", that they make sense, and our sense of continuity is the same as an "absence of shock, or sense of discord, between the terms of thought" (1884, EPs: 160-1). A shock in this sense of continuity disrupts our experience, and we begin to look for some action or conclusion which will make our sense of continuity return. When we are pursuing some definitive conclusion in our thought, the absence of that conclusion is felt like "an aching gap" which we strive to mend (1890, PP1: 250). In this way, our feelings of relation drive inquiry:

> Relation, then, to our topic or interest is constantly felt in the fringe, and particularly the relation of harmony and discord, of furtherance or hindrance of the topic. When the sense of furtherance is there, we are "all right"; with the sense of hindrance we are dissatisfied and perplexed, and cast about us for other thoughts (1890, PP1: 250).

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[32] James says something similar in the *Principles:*

> *[N]othing can be conceived twice over without being conceived in entirely different states of mind.* Thus, my arm-chair is one of the thing of which I have a conception; I knew it yesterday and recognized it when I looked at it. But if I think of it to-day as the same arm-chair which I looked at yesterday, it is obvious that the very conception of it as the same is an additional complication to the thought, whose inward constitution must alter in consequence (1890, PP1: 453-4).

Like Peirce, James has a story in which the disruption of a purpose or stream of thought (belief) results in a sense of unease or discord (doubt), and drives us to "cast about" for other thoughts or procedures which will restore our sense of continuity, or reach our original goal via different methods (inquiry).[33]

More often, as time goes on, James refers to these transitional features of experience collectively as "the fringe".[34] This is his way of describing the vast array of felt relations which branch off from any substantive or focal part of experience. In *Principles* James uses

> the words *psychic overtone, suffusion,* or *fringe*, to designate the influence
> of a faint brain-process upon our thought, as it makes it aware of relations
> and objects but dimly perceived (1890, PP1: 249).

The "fringe", in this context, is James's word for the un- or sub-conscious. Whatever occupies the centre of our attention is surrounded by a fringe of elements which we do not directly attend to, and are not directly conscious of. Mostly these consist in the relations that our current thought or experience does or might have with other experiences or objects of experience, with elements which proceed and follow it in the stream of thought, with memories, and so on.[35] Another metaphor James frequently uses is that a single experience is like a field of vision, with central features which occupy our attention, and less salient margins which lead off in different directions. As the stream of experience progresses, some of those marginal points become central, and the previously central becomes marginal. These relational properties, James says, are the most important aspect of our thought when it is considered functionally, as they are what lead us in certain directions and to certain conclusions (1890, PP1: 449).

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[33] This should also be connected to James notion of the feeling of rationality. Some item, concept or theory is felt to be "rational" if it is felt to be continuous with our previous experience (See 1879, EPh: 32-33; 1881, WB: 99-100; 1882, WB: 57, and VII.1.1).

[34] See Bailey (1999) for a detailed analysis of the different types of relation James's refers to in the *Principles* and elsewhere. Bailey, however, treats the types of relation James delineates (such as association, temporal connectedness, transitional relations, and the fringe) as essentially different. By doing so, Bailey encounters a problem regarding how to differentiate the fringe and the transitive relations (1999: 147-149). Contra Bailey, I'm treating the "transitive relations" and the "fringe" as essentially the same here. If we need a distinction, it is one of function. James uses "fringe" to describe the innumerable relations which stem from a nucleus of consciousness, and the "transitive parts" for those relations which we actually do, through selection, allow to lead us to some conclusion.

[35] Notice that this conception of the "sub-conscious" is radically different from the Freudian concept of the unconscious as a set of drives and ideas which are in principle inaccessible to conscious attention. The Freudian subconscious would in fact seem to be a member of the set of trans-experiential agencies which are rejected by radical empiricism. See VI.3.7 for more on how "sub-conscious selves" can feature in James's experiential account of the subconscious.

In *Talks to Teachers* (1899) James talks about these marginal qualities within a *pulse* or *wave* of experience, following on from his "stream" metaphor for consciousness:

> You remember that consciousness is an ever-flowing stream of objects, feelings, and impulsive tendencies. We saw already that its phases or pulses are like so many fields or waves, each field or wave having usually its central point of liveliest attention, in the shape of the most prominent object in our thought, whilst all around this lies a margin of other objects more dimly realized, together with the margin or emotional and active tendencies which the whole entails. [...] At first sight, it might seem as if, in the fluidity of these successive waves, everything is indeterminate. But inspection shows that each wave has a constitution which can be to some degree explained by the constitution of the waves just passed away (1899, TT: 55).

In this way, the various "pulses", "waves" or "fields" pass on to one another, as the margin of one becomes the centre of the next.[36]

Contrary to atomistic or Humean notions of experience, then, the smallest "unit" of experience we could possibly imagine is not an idea or an image, but a field which has a centre of attention, and a fringe of relations including at least "an earlier and a later part and […] a sense of their continuous procession".[37] In his earlier texts, James is using this

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[36] In his notes on "The Philosophical Problems of Psychology" (1897-8), James emphasises how the margin of one experience can be in relation with a number of different experiences:

> [O]bserve now how the relations between the different fields multiply, the moment these feelings of connexion and continuity between them multiply and diversify their kinds. A part of field A connects itself in one way with a part of field M, in another way with a part of field N, etc. [...] Certain parts are prepotent in the associative process, and the fields fulfil each other and terminate each other in all sorts of specially felt ways, pursuing as we say diverse threads of relation, logical, teleological, descriptive, etc., and succeeding and superseding each other so that the most varied forms of result accrue, and the most varied functional connexions between a given term and other terms (1897-8, ML: 239).

Later, James emphasises how the margin of one field of experience develops into the centre of successive experiences:

> [T]he later fields acquire a margin as well as a centre. There is "more" than that centre; & in the more, *directions*, as "then", "soon," "beyond," "behind" etc. Fields develope or succeed each other along such lines of direction ("activity," "search," "fulfilment," "going right," "going wrong," come in here) (1897-8, ML: 255).

It is worth noting that here we begin to see normativity ("going right" and "going wrong") being explicitly included as part of the relational qualities of experience. See VI.2.4.

[37] James offers a more substantial list in *A Pluralistic Universe*:

analysis to describe the nature of personal consciousness. But during his metaphysical period, we find James applying this notion of experience to reality itself:

> Only concepts are self-identical, only "reason" deals with closed equations; nature is but a name for excess; every point in her opened out and runs into the more; and the only question, with reference to any point we may be considering, is how far into the rest of nature we may have to go in order to get entirely beyond its overflow? (1909, PU: 129).

Nature or reality, considered *as* experience, comes in "pulses", "waves" or "fields", just like personal experience. Each portion of it is continuous with its neighbours, and with those experiences which succeed and precede it.

Some of the most important of the felt relations which make up the fringe of experience are feelings of *tendency*. These are normative or pro-normative feelings regarding "the mutual affinity or belonging together" of certain terms with each other. As James puts it, certain experiences or images "call for" or "fit with" others, just like certain words call for and fit with other words in a sentence. A noun, for instance, "calls for" a verb to be placed in a certain relation to it, and an adverb in another. Another example of a feeling of tendency is our anticipatory intention to say something. Though it is in itself merely a felt relation and cannot be brought to attention, nonetheless the anticipatory feeling tells us when the words that we actually utter agree with it not. When we feel that any process of thought is rational, James tells us, at minimum what we mean is that the different terms of our thought are accompanied by a fringe of felt relations which allow us to feel that they fit together and continue each other without any substantive jolts. Such felt relations of tendency, in this way, give us a sense of *appropriateness*. I'll be returning to this notion in later chapters (1884, EPs: 156; 160-1; see VII.1.1; VI.2.4.).

Often, James connects the fringe of an experience with a certain type of meaning, and the core of an experience with another. If we abstract a word from a sentence, it has a vastly different meaning than it has within the context of a sentence. In the same way, if we take a feature of experience outside of a stream, it will have a different meaning than the meaning it has within it. James differentiates *static* and *dynamic* meaning in this regard. Static meaning, the meaning some word or feature of experience has outside of the sentence or stream, consists in a sensory image (if the term is concrete) or a definition (if the term is abstract). Dynamic meaning concerns the role that term plays within a context, and includes the fringe of relations. Within a sentence, one word leads to another, and carries meaning from the words prior to it, and anticipations of words to

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> In the pulse of inner life immediately present now in each of us is a little past, a little future, a little awareness of our own body, of each other's persons, of these sublimities we are trying to talk about, of the earth's geography and the direction of history, of truth and error, of good and bad, and of who knows how much more? (1909, PU: 129).

follow it. At the very least, we can talk about the feeling of a term continuing and fitting with the sentence or thought as a whole as being a part of its dynamic meaning (1890, PP1: 255). James connects this difference in meaning to his distinction between "knowledge about" and "direct acquaintance". Direct acquaintance, on its own, is mere knowledge of the presence of an object or its image. Knowledge about is knowledge of its relations (1890, PP1: 250).[38] Whereas static meanings are precise, dynamic meanings are more nuanced, vague, and concrete. As philosophers (and psychologists), we cannot let our desire for precision blind us to the importance of these vaguer meanings which arise from the full field of experience (see V.2.2; VI.2.1).

Finally, the felt *significance* of any item of experience is also, according to James, in the relational fringe of the experience:

> Every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows round it. With it goes the sense of its relations, near and remote, the dying echo of whence it came to us, the dawning sense of whither it is to lead. *The significance, the value, of the image is all in this halo or penumbra*, that surrounds and escorts it - or rather that is fused into one with it and has become bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh (1884, EPs: 157-8, emphasis mine).

Another way of putting this is that felt significance concerns dynamic rather than static meaning. This notion of significance will come to play a great role later in the thesis (V.2.2).

§2.3 THE PROBLEM WITH REFERENCE

Now that we have fully detailed James's notion of cognitive relations and the fringe, we can provide a full account of James's radical empirical theory of reference. This theory elicited a number of early criticisms and rejections. B. H. Bode, for instance, one of radical empiricism's most careful critics, suggested that the theory was completely untenable:

> [w]hatever the nature of reference may ultimately turn out to be, there is at present no sufficient ground for the view that an adequate account of it can ever be given in terms of immediate experience (Bode, 1905b: 695).

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[38] We can connect this difference in meaning to the grades of clarity of Peirce. Having a clear and distinct idea, and a definitional account, of some term is one thing. Understanding how to use that term, the contexts it fits in, and the functions it performs, is a more pragmatic grade of understanding (cf. James 1890, PP1: 270; Peirce 1878, W3: 257ff).

James was not unaware of the various criticisms his view entailed. He kept a notebook, generally referred to as "The Miller-Bode Objections", between 1905 and 1908, detailing his engagement with the published criticisms of Bode and similar problems raised by Dickinson Sergeant Miller in correspondence (MEN: 63-130).[39] At the heart of these criticisms was a problem of reference. How, if radical empiricism cannot refer to anything outside of experience, can we ever refer to a common object, or to anything *at all* outside of our own subjective experience?[40]

Summarising the position Bode puts forward in 1905 (Bode 1905a; 1905b), James writes:

> If a series of experiences be supposed, no one of which is endowed immediately with the self-transcendent function of reference to a reality beyond itself, no motive will occur within the series for supposing anything beyond it to exist. It will remain subjective, and contentedly subjective (1906, ERE: 119).

James's radical empirical theory of reference attempts to explain the "transcendence" of reference (an idea's capacity to refer to something other than itself) in terms of an experiential *pointing towards*, which can be found within our actual experience. The critic will suggest that James is caught in a dilemma. Either this "pointing" is contained within immediate experience, and therefore has only the appearance of transcendence, or a thought does indeed "point" to some referent outside of the immediate experience, in which case the radical empiricist has illegitimately brought an element outside of immediate experience into their account. Accepting the first horn means that we have no way of referring to anything outside of subjective experience. Accepting the second horn means that the radical empiricist has broken their own guidelines, and included something trans-experiential into their theory of reference.

Accepting the second horn is essentially the rejection of radical empiricism, as it allows for trans-experiential objects to play an important role in our philosophy. So, we must hope that the radical empiricist can somehow accept the first horn of the dilemma, and that experience itself can perform this "pointing" function, without appealing to trans-experiential elements, and without this resulting in a problematic subjectivism. According to Bode, though, the "function of 'pointing' is impossible, unless the *terminus*

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[39] James's notebooks on these criticisms are collected in *Manuscripts, Essays and Notes* (1905-8, MEN: 65-130). It was Perry who first dubbed these "The Miller-Bode Objections" (Perry 1935, 2: 750-762), though as McDermott points out, James was also responding to "Lotze, Royce, Fechner, Woodbridge, Dewey, and especially Bergson" (McDermott 1976: xli).

[40] This is linked with another problem, dealt with separately in the next section, of whether or not radical empiricism was bound to be solipsistic. As Bode summarises his position:

> The philosophy of pure experience does not account for our awareness of a world beyond our individual experience; and it also fails to show how there can be a world that is common to a multiplicity of individuals (1905a: 133).

ad quem is already present [in immediate experience] in some form" (Bode 1905b: 691). If an experience is to refer to some object, without transcending that experience, then both the referring thought ("the *terminus ad quo*") and the object referred to ("the *terminus ad quem*") must be part of the same experience. But this means that the experience must contain past and future at once, and to accept this would be to "enthrone a paradox and call it an ultimate principle" (Bode, 1905b: 693). Things look dire for the radical empiricist. However, it is this apparent paradox which allows us to understand James's account of reference in a way that avoids Bode's criticisms

In order to see an experience which contains elements of past and future as paradoxical, Bode must have a picture of experience which is atomistic in precisely the way James rejects. James's rich account of our experience sees it as a stream of different "pulses" which fuse and interpenetrate with each other. In "The Knowing of Things Together" (1895), James suggests that minimum unit or "pulse" of experience already has "self-transcendency" precisely in the sense that the "past and future are already a part of it" (1895, EPh: 77-8). As we have seen, every experience contains the future in the very concrete sense that it involves expectations regarding what will follow from that experience. These anticipatory elements are rarely fully conscious, but exist in the fringe of relations at the margins of conscious experience. Similarly, our experiences contain aspects of the past, in the sense that we feel an experience to be a continuation of, interpretation of, or break from the experiences which proceeded it. For James, this is not paradoxical. This is merely giving a role to the fringe or relational features of thought, and offering a richer conception of experience than the Humean orthodoxy. It does not seem paradoxical to say that my current experience of a song is influenced by the notes which came before it, and anticipates the coming refrain (1884, EPh: 166).[41]

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[41] Or, if it is paradoxical, then *every* full experience is somehow paradoxical. Seeing as full and concrete experiences are the only thing upon which we can base knowledge, any logic which analysed them as paradoxical should be rejected. This is one aspect of James's rejection, in *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), of conventionally accepted logic:

> I have now to confess […] that I should not now be emancipated, not now subordinate logic with so very light a heart, or throw it out of the deeper regions of philosophy to take its rightful and respectable place in the world of simple human practice, if I had not been influenced by a comparatively young and very original french writer, Professor Henri Bergson […] I should probably still be blackening endless pages of paper privately, in the hope of making ends meet that were never meant to meet, and trying to discover some mode of conceiving the behavior of reality which should leave no discrepancy between it and the accepted laws of the logic of identity (1909, PU: 97)

Elsewhere in this work, James adopts Hegelian terminology in suggesting that each pulse of experience is in some sense "its own other" in the sense that it contains what it is not, through the relational or fringe elements of experience (1909, PU: 54). Here James characteristically attributes

We should not be tempted to think that because both the *terminus ad quo* and the *terminus ad quem* of the thought are both in some sense present within an experience that the "state of consciousness must be considered […] its own fulfilment" (Bode, 1905b: 693). This would be to mistake the presence of the object within experience as a goal to be *led to*, with the presence of that object as a goal *attained*. To say that the desire for some object and the satisfaction of that desire co-exist in the same experience would be paradoxical. To suggest that the desire for some object, the idea of the absent desired object, an approval of that desire as continuous with our previous experience, the feeling of being lead to the object, and the anticipation of that desire being satisfied all co-exist in the same experience is not paradoxical.[42]

Interestingly James addresses this paradox long before his engagement with Bode, in his "On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology" (1884):

> [t]hat there is a semblance of a paradox here cannot be denied. Grant the procession to know its own existence as a procession; still, how can it know itself as a procession to or from *that* reality – or even in the direction of that reality – without also knowing that reality itself immediately and face to face? But this apparent paradox comes from the confusion of the incomplete thought's standpoint with our own. We think the reality must be known in the procession as it is known to us, when – naming the procession – we call it a procession to or from that reality – also explicitly naming and imagining the latter too. *We* cannot *name* the topic [the *terminus ad quem*] without the reality becoming a direct present object to *us*. But the procession can and does feel its topic in an entirely different way. To substitute our way for this way is a complete falsification of the data into which, as psychologists, we are supposed to inquire (1884, EPh: 166).

James's point here is that to confuse the *terminus ad quem* as we have to think of it when analysing experience (i.e. taken statically), with the *terminus ad quem* as it features in the actual experience leading towards that goal (where it features dynamically) is an instance of the psychologist's fallacy. Though for us the object referred to might be a substantive part of consciousness, in the experience it is a transitive part of consciousness, in the fringe of the experience.[43]

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his confidence in rejecting the accepted laws of logic as fundamental to philosophy to another thinker, Henri Bergson. But this position can be reached purely through James's thought alone. It is worth noting that the position in *A Pluralistic Universe* can either be seen as an extension and elaboration James's radical empiricism, or as a refutation of many of its tenets in response to the Miller-Bode objections. See Moller (2001; 2008) for an excellent exploration of James's response to the Miller-Bode objections.

[42] See 1895, EPh: 77.

[43] We can find a good account of James's position in his notes concerning the *Philosophical Problems of Psychology* (1897-1898):

In short, the picture of experience upon which the apparent paradox depends – as being atomistic and containing only substantive rather than transitive or relational elements – is the very view that radical empiricism is rejecting. Lived experience is in constant motion and transition:

> [l]ife is in the transitions as much as in the terms connected; often, indeed, it seems to be there more emphatically, as if our spurts and sallies forward were the real firing-line of the battle, were like the thin line of flame advancing across the dry autumnal field which the farmer proceeds to burn. In this line we live prospectively as well as retrospectively. It is "of" the past, inasmuch as it comes expressly as the past's continuation; it is "of" the future in so far as the future, when it comes, will have continued *it* (1904, ERE: 42).

What James wants to take seriously is that lived experience does in fact contain leadings, anticipations, senses of continuation, relations to possible future experiences and actions, and other actual and possible relations with other objects of experience. It is these transitional or relational parts of experience which are providing the referential or "pointing" role Bode criticises. Due to this richer picture of experience, accepting the first horn of the dilemma does not lead to paradox.[44]

> various portions of content in the terminal fields "refer" to each other and make report of each other as of so many "objects". From the analytic or purely descriptive point of view there is *nothing transsubjective or mystical in such cognitive function. It is itself a definite portion of the content, namely the feeling of certain definite sorts of continuity or absences of rupture in the developing process itself.* Where that feeling is, the fact of "terminating" is given; and this is what the phenomenist "means" by knowing, or what knowing is "known as." It is a definite sort of connexion, *within* the unrolling scroll of experience, between termini – both of which are immediate phenomenal content (1897-8, ML: 239)

Notice that in this (unpublished) version, James indicated that both *terminus ad quo* and *terminus ad quem* are present in immediate consciousness, which would seem to lead to the kind of interpretation which Bode's criticism relies on.

[44] Exactly *which* elements of our experience performs this knowledge function is not, according to James, available to our introspection. From within our experience, we simply feel a sense of leading within the fringe or margins of the field of consciousness:

> [w]e can never break the thought asunder and tell just which one of its bits is the part that lets us know which subject is referred to; but nevertheless, we always *do* know which of all possible subjects we have in mind. Introspective psychology must here throw up the sponge; the fluctuations of subjective life are too exquisite to be arrested by its coarse means. It must confine itself to bearing witness to the fact that all sorts of different subjective states do form the vehicle by which the same is known; and it must contradict the opposite view (1890, PP1: 454).

However, there is an aspect of Bode's criticism which this answer does not touch. If, according to radical empiricism, we only have access to our subjective experience, and can refer only to subsequent and prior experiences in the same subjective chain, then how can any reference to an objective world occur at all? The radical empiricist must be able to provide some account of this objectivity, or else be doomed to subjectivity and solipsism.[45]

§3. SOLIPSISM

Perhaps the commonest early criticism of James's metaphysics was that it committed him to a form of solipsism. Defining reality and reference in terms of subjective experience seems to prevent the radical empiricist from providing an account of a shared world or other minds. This is in many senses the central criticism of radical empiricism, and I will be spending the rest of the chapter defending against various forms of it. In this section, I will look at the possibility of perceiving other minds (§3.1); spatial experience (§3.2); and the sense of "mineness" which accompanies every experience (§3.3).

§3.1 OTHER WORLDS AND OTHER BODIES

John Russell was one of the earliest, and most sympathetic, critics to consider radical empiricism's problem of solipsism. Russell, unlike Bode, recognised that radical empiricism involved a notion of transcendence, which attempted to prevent solipsism. Nonetheless, according to Russell, the notion of transcendence that radical empiricism employed was not sufficient for the task. He presents this worry with the following:

This position follows from the view that the transitive features of experience cannot be arrested and made into objects for introspection without annihilating them in the process.

[45] There is an additional problem with James's theory of reference which I do not attempt to solve here, as it is irrelevant to my interpretation of his ethics. It concerns how, if the meaning of any term is grounded in actually or possibly being lead to the right kinds of experiences in the *future*, we can refer to objects in the past (especially objects which are incapable of being now experienced). See Gale (2010: 115-116) for an analysis.

> Accepting this transcendence on the part of each passing moment of experience, it does not carry us beyond the individual's *own* experience. The experience from which this transcending starts, its *terminus a quo*, is undeniably just this individual's own experience; as such, it has for its defining character, its *quale*, a "this-mine" quality; and my contention is that the experience to which this transcendence proceeds, its *terminus ad quem*, has necessarily the same attending consciousness of being this my experience. When this experience becomes actual, it becomes actual as this same individual's own experience. Consequently, the radical empiricist's meaning of transcendence involves him in solipsism. There is nothing in transcendence which permits the recognition of other reality than the individual's own experience (J. Russell, 1906b: 607).

Radical empiricism's concept of transcendence involves the notion that knowledge is a matter of cognitive relations which obtain within the stream of experience. Russell's concern is that on this account "the cognitive relation is merely between parts or moments of the same individual's experience" (J. Russell, 1906b: 609). As a result, the only thing which any thought could refer to would be a subsequent experiential state of the same individual.

If it is to answer this criticism, radical empiricism must present an account of experience which is less individualistic than this criticism supposes. It needs to distinguish between one person's subjective experience, and a reality outside of that individual's experience, such that multiple observers and experiencers can come into contact with the same real object of experience. Russell, however, does not think that such an account is available for the radical empiricist, as it would require them "to recognise an objective determinant of experience, and an objective determinant of experience cannot be itself a percipient experience; it must be trans-experiential" (Russell 1906b: 609). As trans-experiential, an objective determinant cannot be appealed to in a radical empiricist account.

A similar criticism is levelled by Russell against the radical empiricist's capacity to talk about other minds. According to Russell, radical empiricism removes the basis upon we can make inferences to "the objective reality of the body of my social fellow". The other person's body does feature in my experience. And the other person's body also features, in a different way, in that other person's experience. However, the two experiences are phenomenologically different, and exist in different chains of relation. Thus, the body that appears in my experience, in relation with my personal memories and expectations, is a different body from the body that appears in the experience of the other person. As Russell puts it: "the terminal experiences of these would-be communicating minds are *different experiences*. We have different termini, but no *co*terminous experience" (J. Russell, 1906b: 611).

James is not unaware of this problem. Even before the expression of this criticism, he says this:

> what is "your body" [...] but a percept in my field. It is only as animating *that* object, *my* object, that I have an occasion to think of you at all. If the body that you actuate be not the very body that I see here, but some duplicate body of your own with which that has nothing to do, we belong to different universes, you and I, and for me to speak of you is folly (1904, ERE: 38).

Ultimately, however, James is not moved by this criticism, and offers a very pragmatic solution. Though the world of my experience and the world of your experience are, to some extent, separate, they have observable pragmatic commonalities and effects on each other. Our best hypothesis for why this is the case is that our subjective experiences co-terminate in a common world. This common world is still experiential, according to radical empiricism, but the same object of experience (or experience-as-object) can feature in two different chains or streams of experience, as easily as one point can be on two (or an infinite number of) different lines (1904, ERE: 8).

James offers some common-sense examples of co-terminus items of experience. In a tug of war, when I am pulling on a rope, and you are pulling on the rope in the opposite direction, then the rope is a common item in both of our experiential streams (1904, ERE: 38). When I blow out the candle which *I* experience, the candle that *you* experience also goes out (1904, ERE: 39). Not only to these types of examples indicate shared objects of experience, but the practical ramifications of your actions on the objects of my experience also give us a sense of an agency not our own:

> The percepts themselves may be shown to differ; but if each of us be asked to point out where his percept is, we point to an identical spot. All the relations, whether geometrical or causal, of the [object] originate or terminate in that spot wherein our hands meet, and where each of us begins to work if he wishes to make the [object] change before the other's eyes. [...] That body of yours which you actuate and feel from within must be in the same spot as the body of yours which I see or touch from without. "There" for me means where I place my finger. If you do not feel my finger's contact to be "there" in *my* sense, when I place it on your body, where then do you feel it. Your inner actuations of your body meet my finger *there*: it is *there* that you resist its push, or shrink back, or sweep the finger aside with your hand (1904, ERE: 41).

Though we, by necessity, have different perspectives, these perspectives (can) refer to the same object. Our *percepts* differ, and if that was all that James meant by experience, then Russell's charge of solipsism might stick. But our experience is practical as well as

perceptual. We operate on reality, and in doing so, we clearly effect each other's experienceable objects, including that most personal object, the body.[46]

In order to make this clearer, let us distinguish between two different ways that we might understand our cognitive relations terminating in an experience which it can be said to *know*. One way sees the terminating experience as a percept, resulting from a particular perspective. We might think of this as our idea of the object terminating *against* it. As every object can result in an infinite number of different percepts, no terminating experience will be identical with another person's terminating experience of the same object.

On a second account, and the account we have seen James express, our cognitive chain terminates in the experience-as-thought being recognised as identical with the experience-as-object. James often expresses this as our cognitive chain terminating by "coalescing" with its object (rather than terminating "against" it), and tells us that it is this which "is the sort of conjunctive union that appears to be experienced when a perceptual terminus 'fulfils'" (1904, ERE: 40). We do not need to think of this "coalescence" as metaphysically as James presents it. In fact, we can think about it in the traditional pragmatist way of "grades of clarity". In the first (superficial) account of the cognitive relation, we terminate in an image of the object, and have a clear and distinct idea of it. In the second (full) account of the cognitive relation, we terminate in a practical relation with the reality known, having a clear, distinct, and pragmatic concept of it.[47] It is this second sense that James uses, and which is better able to combat the accusations of solipsism.

§3.2. SPATIAL RELATIONS

We've seen that James aims to refute the accusation of solipsism by denying that his notion of "experience" is reducible to "actual percepts". Though the content of our percepts might differ, due to perspective, our objects share practical and experiential

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[46] The reader might suspect that this doesn't give us enough reason to *infer* the existence of other minds. However, we should remember the anti-scepticism of the pragmatist (I.2). We do not need a good reason to *believe* in other minds, we need a good reason to *doubt* them. James's radical empiricism gives us no better reason to doubt them than any other philosophical system. Of course, solipsism remains a merely theoretical possibility, but as James puts it in a letter to Russell: "kindly explain how you or any one else escapes solipsism as a *theoretical possibility*" (Letter to J. Russell, Jan 1908, ERE: 292).

[47] See Peirce's "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" (1878, W3: 257ff)

qualities in common. The commonality James refers to most often is spatial location (e.g. 1904, ERE: 42).

Obviously, James cannot think that the spatial properties of an object are outside of experience, and so trans-experiential, as this would reject the core tenet of radical empiricism. Nor, for the same reason, can James hold a Kantian view in which the experience of space is a result of the "inward resources of the mind" being used to order non-spatial sensation. James explicitly rejects such a view (1879, EPs: 80). In its place, he postulates the view that extension is a directly sensational or experiential thing (e.g. 1879, EPs: 66).

However, the critic of the radical empiricist will now be free to repeat the familiar criticism. If the spatial relations James appeals to as common features of different experiences are themselves experiential, then they are subject to the same concerns as the experiences which they relate. Here's Bode pushing precisely this line:

> Is it not true that the perceptions of space are, psychologically considered, every bit as different as are perceptions of objects? The space-relations which appear in visual perception are not apprehended from the point of view of some "absolute" or arbitrarily chosen point, as in geometry, but depend always on the position of the eye. So long as the several subjects are not in precisely the same position, all the corresponding relations in the spatial perception of two observers viewing the same expanse must differ from each other (Bode 1905a: 132).

Once again, we are returned to the dilemma. Either the radical empiricist must appeal to something trans-experiential, or our perceptions of space are irreducibly individual and share nothing in common.[48]

One way of responding to this, I think, is to put pressure on Bode's notion of spatial perception. We do stand in different positions in relation to objects, and so our immediate spatial perceptions of them will differ. But Bode seems, again, to be thinking

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[48] Both G. E. Moore and A. J. Ayer direct a similar criticism against the radical empiricist. According to Ayer, we can suggest that *objects* of experience occupy the same space for two different people, but we cannot suggest that *percepts* within their experience do, seeing as percepts are non-spatial. However, if James's "pure experience" thesis is correct, then objects *are* percepts, and so cannot have spatial properties (Ayer, 1968, 230-233). Similarly, Moore argues that perceptions of contact between two people do not take place in "physical space", but in the "sense-fields" of the two individuals, and thus have no common spatial features (Moore, 1962: 157). Both appear to beg the question against the radical empiricist by assuming the very dualism James is trying to reject. See Bird (1986: 104-5) for a more detailed rebuttal of Ayer; Madden and Chakrabarti (1976: 8-13) for a rejection of Ayer's claim that James is a phenomenalist; and Meyers (1968) for a comparison of James and Moore.

of experience as a set of image-like, momentary percepts. James's notion of spatial experience is not restricted to such a notion.

This thought follows from James's emphasis on relations. An experienced object has practical relations (which include spatial relations) with other experienced objects, relations which are themselves experiential. We have seen that it is these relations which allow us to say that the object of one person's experience is the same as the object of another person's experience. An object will maintain its spatial relations with other objects (such as *next to x*, *on top of y*, *connected to z*) even as it changes the spatial relations it demonstrates due to our particular perspective (such as *behind x, left of y, or near to me*). Again, engaging practically with the object will emphasise these more objective features. A person who is blind and a person who is deaf will have very different percepts of the music box between them. But both will experience it as *there*, as *next* to that thing, as *on* the table, as resisting touch, as capable of storing small objects, and so on. And if both people try to take the box, the same experiential object, at the same location, will be contested between them. These spatial and practical relations do not change depending on how we position ourselves, and so they do not seem to be vulnerable to Bode and Russell's type of criticism.

§3.3 THE "MINENESS" OF EXPERIENCE

An element of Russell's criticism which we have not yet addressed concerns the irreducible "mineness" of each experience. Every experience which I have comes with a familiar sense that it is *my* experience, and that its object is *my* object of experience. But this seems to lead to another kind of solipsism. If the only possible referent of any thought is an experience which possesses this feature of "mineness", then it is impossible to refer to any object not already incorporated into my own stream of consciousness.

To answer this, we should understand that the "mineness" of experience which concerns Russell is one relation among many on the radical empiricist account of experience, usually located in the fringe or margins of our experience. Every experience is experienced as a continuation of the experiences which preceded it, and so related to a personal biography in such a way that we can consider it *mine* (1904, ERE: 23ff). The continuity that one personal experience can have to another within the same stream is one of the most intimate types of conjunctive relation possible (1904, ERE: 26). Nonetheless, this "mineness" is just one relation among many others and is not always (or often) a central feature of our experience.

Nor does this "mineness" relation exhaust or occlude the other relations an object can enter into. One object of experience can be "mine" as it features in my experience, and "yours" as it features in yours, without either relation contradicting the other:

> even though "a feeling only is as it is felt" there is still nothing absurd in the notion of its being felt in two different ways at once, as yours namely and mine. It is, indeed, "mine" only as it is felt as mine, and "yours" only as it is felt as yours. But it is felt as neither *by itself*, but only when "owned" by our two several remembering experiences (1904, ERE: 66).

If, rather than an irreducible and intrinsic property of any individual experience, the "mineness" of an experience refers to one of many extrinsic relations which an experienceable object can enter into, there is no reason to suspect that this "mineness" leads to the solipsism that Russell is concerned with.[49]

James suspects that we have a tendency to over intellectualise our experience when we introspect upon it, and focusing on this sense of "mineness" is one example. In fact, James explicitly rejects the Kantian idea that the "I think" must be able to accompany all thoughts:

> The "I think" which Kant said must be able to accompany all my objects, is the "I breathe" which actually does accompany them. There are other internal facts besides breathing [...] and these increase the assets of "consciousness," so far as the latter is subject to immediate perception; but breath, which was ever the original of "spirit," breath moving outwards, between the glottis and the nostrils, is, I am persuaded, the

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[49] There is an additional problem which Russell raises, but which is not directly relevant to my aims here. The criticism concerns the nature of *judgement*. According to Russell:

> The judgements, "This is identical with that," "this is not that," stubbornly refuse to be resolved into mere experience processes. This judging consciousness seems to be a positive addition to the content of experience […]. True enough it is to say, I experience this judging function; but it is quite another thing to persuade my mind that this judging function is itself a mode of experiencing (Russell 1906a: 408).

It would be a serious problem if James could describe knowing in experiential terms, but lose all sight of the role which the knower or judger plays in attaining it. As this is not directly relevant to my aim here, I will not spend time answering this criticism. It will suffice here to say that James has a strategy for overcoming this criticism available to him. Russell's criticism only makes sense if we consider experience to be a passive procession to which we relate as a kind of spectator. If this were the only account of experience that the radical empiricist had available, we would indeed loose the participation of the knower in the attainment of knowledge. However, James in fact has a much more active sense of experience, as something which we act upon and within. In such an active account, the knower's contribution to knowledge does not seem alien at all.

essence out of which philosophers have constructed the entity known to them as consciousness (1904, ERE: 19).

As I read this, this is James suggesting that the felt continuity of our experience, the relation with other previous experiences which constitutes this sense of "mineness", is a primarily *bodily* feeling.[50] As James puts it in "The Experience of Activity":

> The world experienced […] comes at all times with our body as its centre, centre of vision, centre of action, centre of interest. Where the body is is "here"; when the body acts is "now"; what the body touches is "this" […] The body is the storm centre, the origin of co-ordinates, the constant place of stress in all that experience-train. Everything circles round it, and is felt from its point of view. The word "I", then, is primarily a noun of position, just like "this" and "here" (1905, ERE: 85).

Our sense of continued "consciousness" just is the sense of the continuity of our experience, and this sense of continuity is rooted in the continuation of our body as the centre of our experience.[51]

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[50] It is worth noting that James switches the idea that the "I think" must be able to accompany all thoughts (which Kant did defend) with the idea that the "I think" must be able to accompany all of our objects of thought (which Kant did not defend). This alteration might mean that James's criticism might not hit Kant at all. Nonetheless, James's central idea – that the continuity of thought is primarily a matter of bodily experience, rather than an intellectual relation – remains.

[51] Interestingly, James eventually convinced Russell of his position. Their correspondence continued for many years, and eventually Russell, upon reading *The Meaning of Truth* (1909), found that he agreed with James's account of reference and truth:

> [My] change in mental view, I attribute mainly to my own attempts to remain an anti-pragmatist, and as such to meet the counter-attack of the pragmatist; to answer the crucial question relating to the meaning, the content, of a true idea, and the possibility of distinguishing between a true and a false idea. It dawned upon me at last, that to go on answering this pivotal question after the manner of intellectualism was about as effective in the way of defence as the device of the ostrich in protecting itself from assault by hiding its head under its wing (J. Russell 1910: 23).

Russell eventually agreed with James that merely asserting the capacity of thought to transcend itself and refer to an object not sufficient, but that a more concrete account was needed, and that such an account would be along the lines of radical empiricism.

§4. Reality

Radical empiricism consists in the ontological claim that reality is at base experiential, and the epistemological claim that we can refer to nothing which is not experiential. We've seen that in order to combat the criticism that his radical empiricism is solipsistic, James has insisted that his account of experience is richer and more objective than his critics assume. This section aims to give an account of James's notion of objective reality.

The section shall centre on an apparently damning criticism, and build a notion of objective reality in response. The criticism concerns the nature of what is "real" according to the radical empiricist. Radical empiricism's central proposition is that "every kind of thing experienced must somewhere be real" (1904, ERE: 81). But seeing as dreams, hallucinations, fictions, and fantasies are experienceable, these phenomena are also real, according to radical empiricism. Indeed, James admits openly that concepts, memories, and fancies are just as real as perceptual reality, in the sense that they "are in their first intention mere bits of pure experience [...] single thats which act in one context as objects, and in another context as mental states" (1904, ERE: 9).[52] But if this is the case, then what meaning does the word "reality" keep? Anything it is possible to imagine is real, according to the radical empiricist. In many senses, this is the opposite criticism from the accusation of solipsism. Radical empiricism seems doomed to either be too ontologically narrow, or too ontologically liberal.[53]

Not only can this criticism be answered, I shall argue, but it can be answered in a way that reveals a surprising strength for the radical empiricist. However, to reach this solution we must take a slight tangent, and examine James's presentation of the

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[52] James says something similar in the *Principles:*

> *As* objects of fancy, *as* errors, *as* occupants of dreamland, etc., they are in their way as indefeasible parts of life, as undeniable features of the Universe, as the [objective] realities are in their way. The total world of which the philosophers must take account is thus composed of the realities *plus* the fancies and illusions (1890, PP2: 920).

[53] Bailey notes a similar problem as concerns *relations*:

> James' theory makes all relations equally "real," and we might find that conclusion uncomfortable [...] he cannot say that, properly speaking, such and such a relation is a real one (in the sense of being a property of the universe) and this and so is not – *any* relation we perceive, apparently, we perceive *as a genuine property of pure experience* (Bailey, 1999: 150).

The solution I offer in this section will apply equally to Bailey's concern and to Bode's.

experiential nature of reality, and two other criticisms that can emerge out of it. The section will start by looking at James's work on the subjective feeling of reality (§4.1); followed by an examination of how mind-dependent radical empiricism makes reality (§4.2); before giving a full account of the difference between subjective and objective reality (§4.3); and ending on the presentation of a surprising strength of the radical empiricist account (§4.4).

§4.1 THE FEELING OF REALITY

In his *Principles* James offers us an account of reality in terms of feeling. He links it to an emotion or feeling of "consent", of which we will have more to say later (1890, PP2: 913-4; V.3.1).[54] When we consent to some object, we see it as real, and when we see it as real we believe in it (1890, PP2: 917-8). Reality *for us* is what we find interesting and important, what stimulates our interest and demands our attention (1890, PP2: 924). We cannot doubt those things which are real to us in this subjective way (1890, PP2: 928). James explicitly connects the feeling of reality with the fringe of relations and a sense of continuity:

> [The words "real" or "outwardly existing"] stand for certain relations (immediate, or through intermediaries) to ourselves. Whatever concrete objects have hitherto stood in those relations have been for us "real", "outwardly existing". So that when we now abstractly admit a thing to be 'real' (without perhaps going through any definite perception of its relations), it is as if we said "it belongs in the same world with those other objects." [...]. When I believe that some prehistoric savage chipped this flint, for example, the reality of the savage and of his act makes no direct appeal either to my sensation, emotion, or volition. What I mean by my belief in it is simply my dim sense of a *continuity* between the long dead savage and his doings and the present world of which the flint forms part. It is pre-eminently a case for applying our doctrine of the "fringe" [...] The word "real" itself is, in short, a fringe (1890, PP2: 946-7).

Our lived realities are those things which are so important to us that we cannot doubt them. These indubitable realities can be entirely subjective (such as my love for my partner), or can be more practical, instinctive, or common-sense beliefs (such as fire will

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[54] We can find a similar idea in the *Varieties:* "the feeling of reality may be something more like a sensation than an intellectual operation properly so called" (1902, VRE: 60). And, subsequently: "[t]he truth is that in the metaphysical and religious sphere, articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of the same conclusion" (1902, VRE: 67).

burn; physical laws; etc.) (see I.5). We also attribute reality (in a more abstract, less felt sense) to objects which do or can exist in relation with these important features. As such, our sense of reality consists in the felt importance of some objects, and their continuous relation to a wider collection of objects to which they "belong". This is what James means when he tells us our sense of reality is a fringe.

This definition of reality as a kind of fringe in the *Principles* remains subjective, but it is my contention that we can apply this notion to solve the problem of fantasy which radical empiricism faces.

§4.2 Mind Dependence and Independence

What radical empiricism appears to be lacking is an account of reality which is capable of distinguishing between subjective fantasy and objective reality. James is clear that he does want to offer such an account. In "A World of Pure Experience" he asserts that "[p]ractically [...] our minds meet in a world of objects which they share in common, [and] which would still be there, if one or several of the minds were destroyed" (1904, ERE: 39). James's clear commitment to an objective and publicly available shared world is marred somewhat by James's caveat "one or several minds". We might interpret this as James's reluctance to suggest that there is an objective reality which is *truly* mind-independent, as he merely commits himself to a reality that is independent of any particular mind. The notion that public reality is made by the consensus of participating minds is not going to be overly satisfying if we are attempting to extricate James from the assertion that fiction and reality cannot be separated under radical empiricism. Publicly agreed fiction is not the same as objective reality.

One potential solution available to the radical empiricist, and the one which James seems to take, is to suggest that there are some aspects of the experienceable world which are mind-dependent (though not dependant on any one actual mind), and some aspects which are real independent of *any* minds. James articulates this in a letter to John Russell:

> Reality [...] is of two orders, 1. the sensible order, (which is neither true nor false, but simply is) and 2. the order of previously admitted truths. A new truth must somehow fit these two things and marry them together with as little strain as possible on 2. (Letter to J. Russell, Feb 1907, ERE: 290)

James distinguishes between reality which just *is*, and the various knowledges and truths we can have *about* this reality. The first is not dependent on us in any way, but

simply *is.* The second *is* dependent on us. There could be no actual truths without a community of truth-seekers (though there would be material for potential true beliefs).

James returns to this claim in *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), during his presentation of Bergson's anti-intellectualism. Bergson holds that concepts are practical (in the sense of instrumental) rather than theoretical, and James agrees. But James still holds, contra Bergson, that concepts have a *reality*:

> Concepts are realities of a new order, with particular relations between them. These relations are just as much directly perceived, when we compare our various concepts, as the distance between two sense-objects is perceived when we look at it (1909, PU: 122n1).

Conceptual orders then, though they are a product of human thought, demonstrate reality in two senses. Firstly, they are (often) drawn from, and (always) find their practical application in, experience. Secondly, they demonstrate experiential relations between themselves which we can discover, and which are not dependent on any one mind or set of minds. As such, concepts are a "co-ordinate realm" of reality (1909, MT: 37). Nonetheless, they are ontologically dependent on the existence of thinking creatures. Were we to remove all creatures capable of conceptual thought from reality, then concepts too would vanish, and reality would be changed.[55] But some less conceptual and less ordered version of experienceable reality would remain. It is in this sense we should interpret James's "one or many minds" caveat.[56]

So, James appears happy to hold that there is a reality independent of thinking beings, which we can come to know, and also realities which are ontologically dependent on thinking beings, though possessing a nature which is discovered rather than created. [57] Concepts are as real as sensational objects, as both are experiential. However, now it

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[55] Concepts are not dependent on us for their validity, of course. The general features of reality which concepts refer to (or fail to refer to) are independent of these concepts, and of us. See I.6.1; I.6.2.

[56] It would be another question, and not one I aim to explore here, what would happen if all organisms which could experience any sensation whatsoever were to vanish from the world. Would a reality which was fundamentally experience-like still exist when there was nothing to experience it? I would suggest, on the basis of James's acceptance that *potential* experience is real even if it is not *actually* experienced, that a reduced sense of reality might still be maintained (§1.5).

[57] As Cooper puts it:

> The trail of the human serpent is over everything […] but there is *something* under the trail, some pure experience which constrains the direction that the trail takes (Cooper, 1999: 379).

Though we can only know the world through the artefacts of human thought and practice, this does not prevent some sort of mind-independence.

seems more likely that James will have to bite the bullet, and say that fantasies, fictions, dreams and hallucinations are real, seeing as these share the same experiential nature.

§4.3 Distinguishing Objective and Subjective Realities

Let us consider one more criticism before we answer this. As Bode tells us, if our subjective fantasies and the objective world are ontologically indistinct, then it is surprising that we rarely confuse the two. If the dualism between thought and reality obtains, as Bode holds that it does, then this lack of confusion is explained. Further, the radical empiricist may not even have the grounds for describing how the distinction between "subjective" and "objective" even arose, if they are in no way different in nature (Bode, 1905b: 688).[58]

What James needs is a method of distinguishing between subjective and objective reality, whilst appealing solely to experiential notions. One tool which James has available to him is the notion of *tension* or *force*. In describing the difference between an experience-as-object and an experience-as-thought, James suggests that the physical experience-as-object as it appears in relation with other physical objects displays "the curious stubbornness [...] of fact" (1904, ERE: 12). The relations and properties of the experience-as-object resist us, resist change, resist being imagined differently, and tend to "reassert" themselves forcefully if we treat them as having different properties. The experience-as-thought, on the other hand, tends to exhibit the opposite of these features, and so demonstrates "the fluidity of fancy" (1904, ERE: 21). For instance, in my imagination I might easily relocate the study I am sitting in to the Taj Mahal (though I might still be subject to certain limitations, such as my aesthetic sense). However, in reality such a project would prove enormously costly and practically challenging. Facts about architecture, geography, physics, technology, economics and politics all strongly resist my attempts to move my study to the Taj Mahal. It is this resistance or tension which

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[58] It is not only James's critics who think he has this problem. According to Suckiel, for instance,

> such a constructionalist view of reality, whatever its novelty or interest, seems to founder irretrievably upon the question of the objective world […] radical empiricism lacks a way of adequately explaining the commonality of our experience, and hence falters on the problem of objectivity (Suckiel, 1982: 140).

This leads some commenters to conclude that James rejects the notion of objective reality at all. According to a recent interpretation by Richard Gale, for instance, James is an avowed ontological relativist, who makes reality mean "____ is real for self ____ at time ____" (Gale, 1999: 13; cf 1999: 190-198).

forces us to attribute to certain sensations an external or objective reality. The lack of this tension in our imagination means that we do not tend to attribute this objectivity to fantastical objects.

Bode recognises that this option is available to the radical empiricist, however, and does not think that it is sufficient. He points out that there are images and thoughts which "may involve, to the same extent as perception, an arrest of whatever activities may be going on" (Bode 1905b: 687). These thoughts or images assert themselves with a similar force as objective facts. Indeed, often they hit us with such force that they demand attention *more* than our environment, such as in times of anxiety, guilt, or merely when our environment is duller than our imagination. So, Bode can reassert his criticism:

> From the point of view of this theory, it seems a peculiar fact that images normally do not even tend to become confused with perceptions, in spite of the fact that the image may create considerable tension, whereas perceptions to which we have become habituated arouse scarcely any such tension whatever (Bode 1905b: 688).

The notion of tension which Bode uses to make this point seems slightly weaker than the notion that James is using. Most surprising or vivid imaginary experiences do not demonstrate the "stubbornness" which James suggests is important in attributing objective reality to an experience. We can usually think such imaginings away, or imagine them differently, despite their novelty and ability to command our attention. However, it is certainly *possible*, though perhaps more pathological than Bode indicates, to be assailed by vivid images which demonstrate the right kind of stubbornness. If tension was the only thing James had to offer, the radical empiricist might be stuck.

However, as well as tension, James also appears to appeal to the notions of *context* and *function* as playing a role in distinguishing fantasy from reality. I'll take the notion of context first. Part of what James means when he refers to the "stubbornness" of objective fact is not just the insistence of the phenomena of the object, but also its relation with other physical objects in a context. Objective objects in our public world tend to demonstrate relations with each other which we cannot think away, and tend to act on one another in a way that experiences-as-thoughts do not. As James puts it:

> The general group of experiences that act, that do not only possess their natures intrinsically, but wear them adjectively and energetically [...] comes inevitably to be contrasted with the group whose members, having identically the same natures, fail to manifest them in the "energetic" way (1904, ERE: 17).

Experiences-as-objects demonstrate their properties energetically, which means that they act on other things around them. In the world of objective fact, "consequences always accrue". We cannot escape objects acting on one-another in ways that are not up

to us, and we cannot avoid those interactions having irreversible effects. James does suggest that if there were not a "perceptual world" to serve as the "reductive" to our imagined world, them "our world of thought would be the only world, and would enjoy complete reality in our belief" (1904, ERE: 12). It is the fact that we do have this more resistant world, in which objects act on one another in energetic ways, that means that our "internal" world comes to be contrasted with an "external" world.

The third way we have of distinguishing between our fantastical thoughts and those that (potentially) have objectivity is *function.* We use our concepts and thoughts to navigate around sensible reality, and to practically engage with it. As such, we require them to be relatively accurate, and we reject the concepts that do not function correctly. We test the validity of our conceptions against sensible experience, and so sift the conceptions which can be verified from those which are merely fantastical. To a limited extent, we do this individually, but to gain more objectivity we rely on the experiences of others. Comparing our experiences with that of others helps us to find what we share with them and what we do not, and so helps us distinguish between the shared, common store of experiences, and the private and imaginary ones.

This leads me to suggest that James has at least three "layers" of experienceable reality.[59] *Sensible* reality is the public, objective world of sensation, in which objects act on one another energetically, and consequences accrue. *Conceptual* reality is more mind-dependant than sensible reality, but it aims at verifiability, and so (unlike sensible reality, which merely *is*) is a realm of truth and falsity. *Fantasies* are those aspects of experience which do not aim to be, or cannot be, verified in objective or public reality. Each of these types of reality are experiential, and, taken in pure experienceable terms "in their first intention", can be taken "twice over" as external or objective in one context, and subjective and internal in another (1904, ERE: 9). Even fantasy is not experienced as internal, in its first intention:

> [t]he objects of dreamers and hallucinated persons are wholly without general validity. But even were they centaurs and golden mountains, they still would be "off there," in fairy land, and not "inside" of ourselves (1904, ERE: 11).[60]

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[59] These different "layers" are certainly not exclusive. In fact, in his *Principles*, James adduces seven different "worlds" into which the various different facts of experience can be parsed (1890, PP2: 920ff).

[60] James is quoting his colleague Hugo Münsterberg here (Gründzuge der Psychologie, 1900, Vol 1: 48).

Nonetheless, through the features of the experiences themselves, their function, context, and felt tensions, and through the help of other people's experiences, we can sift the subjective from the objective.[61]

We've seen that James thinks of experience as having a focused centre of attention, and an indeterminate fringe or "halo" of relations which stem from it (§2.2). When James makes the ontological claim that reality is experiential in the radical empiricism papers of 1904-5, he applies and objectifies this account of experience. Publicly available and objective features of experienceable reality form solid "nuclei", from which objective and subjective relations stem, pointing towards other experiences, objects, and their relations. Subjective experiences, such as my imagined fantastical objects, have far fewer relations with the objective features of experience than other objective objects do. On the basis of this, we distinguish between subjective and objective realities.

James has several colourful ways of demonstrating the multi-levelled picture of reality he is presenting. He suggests that the sensible reality is like "the nucleus" made up of the "the originally strong experiences", and to this we add our conceptual reality, "making [this] strong also in imagination, and building out the remoter parts of the physical world by their means", and finally "around this core of reality the world of laxly connected fancies and mere rhapsodical objects floats like a bank of clouds". In these subjective suburbs of reality "all sorts of rules are violated" which remain constant in the sensible and the conceptual realities (1904, ERE: 17-18). Elsewhere, he compares the radical empiricist picture of the world to a shrunken head:

> Prima facie, if you should liken the universe of absolute idealism to an aquarium, a crystal globe in which goldfish are swimming, you would have to compare the empiricist universe to something more like one of those dried human heads […] The skull forms a solid nucleus; but innumerable feathers, leaves, strings, beads, and loose appendices of

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[61] My interpretation steers James between the scientistic theory that he clearly wished to deny, and a rejection of the importance of scientific methodology which would lead him away from Peircean realism. As such, I differ from readers of James who wish to claim that radical empiricism stands as a rejection of the centrality of scientific methodology. Rosenbaum, for instance, interprets James as suggesting that every feature of human experience is equally revelatory and significant, and that radical empiricism involves the view that

> science is no more incisive in its capture of reality than is any other mode of art. All human activity is equally revelatory of what is […] no particular mode of human activity is naturally more relevant to getting the truth about the world (Rosenbaum, 2015: 135).

On the contrary, James held scientific, communal inquiry to be the *sole* method of reaching truth, but rejected the view that any particular science could provide a complete description of reality.

every description float and dangle from it, and, save that they terminate
in it, seem to have nothing to do with one another (1904, ERE: 24).

These three levels of reality are different in the amount of tension which they
demonstrate, the context which they exist in, and the functions which they fulfil. This
allows us to differentiate the public, objective reality of sense, from the objective but
mind-dependent world of concepts, and from the more subjective reality of fantasy. But
the three are not ontologically, structurally, or self-evidently distinct. And in this, lies a
surprising strength for the radical empiricist picture.[62]

§4.4 A Surprising Strength

The original criticism this section aimed to address was that radical empiricism could
not give an account of the difference between fantasy and reality. I have suggested that
it *can* give such an account, by appealing to features of experience itself, and to other
people's experience.

Interestingly, this means that radical empiricism is far better placed to account for the
actual ambiguity we can experience between fantasy and objective reality, and the
mistakes that we can make when attempting to distinguish them, than a theory which
holds fantasy and reality to be self-evidently distinct. Indeed, the radical empiricist can
push the criticism back to the critic, asking how someone like Bode, who holds that
thought and objective reality are self-evidently distinct, can account for the mix-ups
between sensible, conceptual, and fantastical reality which do in fact occur. In short,

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[62] Banks (2014: 96-104) is, to my knowledge, the only other scholar who attempts to address this
problem with James's metaphysics, though he goes about it in a different way. According to
Banks, though a dream or hallucination *seemed* to have the phenomenology of reality or
externality, in fact, looking back retrospectively when it is revealed that they cannot lead us to
the right experiences, we realise that they actually lacked this phenomenology. My assertion that
I perceived something was never an assertion at all, seeing as perception requires there to be an
object, and in hallucination no such object exists. Such a solution seems problematic, not only
textually, but philosophically. Textually, James does, in fact, tell us that hallucinations
demonstrate the phenomenology of being "out there", in an external world. Philosophically, this
solution requires the somewhat sceptical position of allowing that people are capable of being
wrong not just about what their phenomenology indicates, but being wrong about their having
felt some phenomenology *at all*. The purpose for offering this kind of defence appears to be the
desire to differentiate between cases of mistaken perception, and cases in which there was *no real
object* to be perceived at all. But *this* is to assume that imaginary objects are not objects, which is
to force a kind of physicalist bias to James's neutral theory of pure experience.

James will respond with the question *"are* thought and thing as heterogeneous as is commonly said?" (1904, ERE: 15, emphasis mine).

Certainly, we are frequently unable to distinguish between what is the product of our sensation, and what is the product if our conceptual faculties. James asks:

> [h]ow, if "subject" and "object" were separated "by the whole diameter of being" and had no attributes in common, could it be so hard to tell, in a presented and recognised material object, what part comes in through the sense-organs and what part comes "out of one's own head" (1904, ERE: 16).

And again:

> If "physical" and "mental" meant two different kinds of intrinsic nature, immediately, intuitively, and infallibly discernible, and each fixed forever in whatever bit of experience it qualified, one does not see how there could ever have arisen any room for doubt or ambiguity. But if, on the contrary, these words are words of sorting, ambiguity is natural (1905, ERE: 76).

Not only is it often difficult or impossible to discern exactly what we are contributing to sensible experience, but we can also easily mistake our instrumental concepts for absolute realities. In this lies the heart of James's suspicion of "intellectualism", or the mistake of thinking that the conceptual exhausts the real. Our concepts can help us navigate and engage with practical reality. But in treating them as absolutely real, rather than fallible products of our practical engagement with reality, concepts such as gender, race, and class can cause a number of serious problems.

There are also elements of our experience which seem to be genuinely *between* the objective and the subjective. Again, this is a hard thing to explain in a theory that holds there is an obvious ontological split between subjective and objective features of reality. James calls these

> *appreciations*, which form an ambiguous sphere of being, belonging with emotion of the one hand, and having objective "value" on the other, yet seeming not quite inner nor quite outer, as if a diremption had begun but had not yet made itself complete [...] Sometimes the adjective wanders as if uncertain where to fix itself. Shall we speak of seductive visions or visions of seductive things? Of wicked desires or of desires of wickedness? Of healthy thoughts or of thoughts of healthy objects? Of good impulses, or of impulses toward the good? Of feelings of anger, or angry feelings? (1904, ERE: 18).[63]

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[63] Elsewhere James calls these "affectional facts", such as emotional and evaluative features of experience, which are ambiguous between "objective" and "subjective" interpretations. Such

This account of value experiences which demonstrate both objective and subjective features will play a large role in the theory of James's ethics which I am presenting.

In short, radical empiricism holds that our notion of objective reality is something which we construct over time, by attending to the features of our experience, and through communal inquiry. Objectivity is not given or self-evident. In this regard, radical empiricism agrees with regular empiricism. Reality does not come ready labelled, and there is no "bell in us [which] tolls to let us know for certain when truth is in our grasp" (1896, WB: 33). The various ways we have of organising and conceptualising our experience are not innate, but come from communal effort and inquiry. Were we to lose these ways of organising and interpreting experience, we would be "lost in the midst of the world", reality itself offering us no immediate assistance in discerning fact from fiction (1890, PP1: 207).

If our notion of objective reality is something achieved through inquiry, rather than something which is self-evident, then we should be able to predict two things. First, we should be able to show historical evidence that our concepts of objective reality did, in fact, evolve over time. And second, we should find that when isolated, and when the capacity to compare experiences with others is removed, then people will find it harder to maintain their grasp on the distinction between objective and subjective realities. I think we can find evidence of both, and, what's more, I think we can find places where James talks about both. I'll take each in turn.

We might think that the confusion between fantasy and reality generally happens more rarely today than it used to. History is full of oracles and sages, who claimed that their dreams could foretell objective reality. People of the past often believed themselves to have encountered Gods and demons. According to James, in the far past "[m]en believed whatever they thought with any liveliness, and they mixed their dreams with their realities inextricably". As time goes on, however, we inquire (both practically, and more formally in science and philosophy) into what is objective, and what is not, and get better at discerning the difference, though "[e]ven to-day science and philosophy are still laboriously trying to part fancies from realities" (1907, P: 86). Our personal development shows this trend also. Children give a great deal of weight to their fantasies, and in their minds "fancies and realities live side by side", though they do tend to ground their fantasies with sensational reality, in some "doll or other material object [which] evidently solidifies belief, little as it may resemble what it is held to stand for" (1890,

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affectional facts remain relatively "pure", in the sense of being "equivocal" between categorisations of them as either "rigorously physical" or "rigorously mental" (1905, ERE: 72-76). See VI.2.5.

PP2: 932).[64] As we grow up, we become more connected to objective reality. This progression which we show in our personal lives, and in the life of the human race as a whole, is inexplicable on an account which sees fantasy and reality as self-evidently distinct, but is predicted by the radical empiricist model. Thus, our tendency to become better at distinguishing between objective and subjective reality over time suggests the superiority of James's hypothesis.

Secondly, radical empiricism predicts that we should be able to show cases where isolation results in a failure of the ability to discern fantasy from reality. In fact, in our everyday lives, we have sayings which reflect such a phenomenon. We say that people are "losing touch with reality" and that they are "living in a dream world", and we reserve such phrases for people who place more importance on their subjective worlds than on the objective and public reality. In more extreme cases, when isolated (for instance in solitary confinement) for prolonged lengths of time, people tend to hallucinate, and find it difficult to tell the difference between these hallucinations and objective reality.[65] Radical empiricism predicts this for two reasons. Firstly, James shows that even imaginative experiences present themselves as having a subjective and objective pole, that is as having the same structural properties as objective experience. My imagination of a unicorn is still presented as being outside or "off there", rather than self-evidently "internal" (1904, ERE: 11). This means such experiences are capable of being confused with experiences of genuinely external realities. Secondly, radical empiricism suggests that our ability to discern between fantasy and reality is aided by other people. When isolated, we lose this assistance, and so are more liable to confuse our imaginings for objective reality. James, in fact, says just this about hallucinations:

> [A hallucinatory candle] exists, to be sure, in a fashion, for it forms the content of that mind's hallucination; but the hallucination itself, though unquestionably it is a sort of existing fact, has no knowledge of *other* facts; and since those *other* facts are the realities *par excellence* for us, on the only things we believe in, the candle is simply outside of our reality and belief altogether (1890, PP2: 917).

It is the relations the imaginary candle has with other experiences, rather than properties it possesses intrinsically, which indicate its objective reality. If we are removed from our

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[64] Part of what James is doing in this passage is arguing that *sensational* reality is always taken to be the paramount reality, so that we need to ground our fantasies in some sensible features to consider them plausible candidates for reality.

[65] See (Smith, 2006) for an overview of the psychological and sociological studies into the effects of solitary confinement in prison inmates. Almost every study from 1950 onwards shows that a significant proportion of people hallucinate, experience intense fantasies, visual or auditory distortions, or paranoid thoughts, whilst in solitary confinement for a prolonged time.

ability to trace these relations, we are removed from our ability to discern its status as a fantasy or reality.

There is a further benefit to the radical empiricist approach. Fantasies and fictions are not just things to be distinguished from reality. They are often things which give our lives meaning. We have fantasies which help us shape our future, plans, aims, and ambitions, which help to guide us, and which sometimes generate actions which lead us to try and actualise these imaginary objects. We have shared fantasies, which shape our sexual, familial or platonic relationships. We have culturally transmitted fictions, which take the forms of myths, art, and popular culture, and which provide us with narratives, roles, and cultural cues for our general social interaction. These are just some examples of the ways in which those features of our lives which we might consider subjective help shape our lives, and actually help shape our objective reality.[66]

These are all phenomena that are very hard to explain if the separation between the objective and subjective aspects of our experience are stable and self-evident. At the expense of abandoning the idea that we can easily tell between subjective and objective realities, radical empiricists gain the capacity to explain a whole range of phenomenon which their critics cannot. A theory such as Bode's will be limited to discarding such cases as "mistakes" or "illusions", and so will mask the important contributions they can make to our shared reality.

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[66] The additions to reality which fantasies make are not always positive. Rae Langton (2009) describes how the fantasies of men, and the popular myths circulated by a system which commodifies women's bodies, serve to contribute to the objectification of women. In this context, Langton talks about "projective beliefs". These are desires or fantasies which are projected onto the world, and which demand that the world change in response to them. There are varying levels or intensities of these beliefs, with mere wishful thinking being at one end, and the alterations of the structures and possibilities of objective reality being at the other. Langton quotes MacKinnon as suggesting that:

> the beliefs of the powerful become [proven], in part because the world actually arranges itself to affirm what the powerful want to see. If you perceive this as a process, you might call it force, or at least pressure of socialization or what money can buy. If it is imperceptible as a process, you may consider it voluntary or consensual or free will or human nature or just the way things are. Beneath this, though, the world is not entirely the way the powerful say it is or want to believe it is (MacKinnon, 1987: 164, quoted in Langton 2009: 264).

Something which started as a fantasy or "wishful thinking" ends, if the holder or holders of that fantasy have sufficient power within social reality, with our objective reality being shaped in accordance with it. The idea that our wilful belief can alter reality is very close to James's "will to believe" theory, which we will look at later (VII.1.4). What this quote from MacKinnon indicates is that James's will to believe theory needs to be more responsive to the role of power in these will to believe cases. Hopefully James's theory can illuminate features of the phenomenon MacKinnon is concerned about here. This is an interesting research project for another time.

§5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter I have reviewed James's metaphysical position, and defended it against several of the criticisms pertinent both to his own project and the project of this thesis. These criticisms centre on the accusation that in presenting a metaphysics which appeals only to experience, James loses the capacity to provide an account of an objective reality. I have argued that James, in fact, can provide an account of an objective reality in experiential terms, provided we think of experience as rich enough, and I have defended this richer notion of experience against several of James's critics.

The position which emerges is a metaphysics in which what is real must be experiential, and everything that is experienced must be thought of as real (in some sense). Not only substantive features of our experience, but also relations between them are considered real on this account. As well as the obvious static objects, terms, and conclusions, experience consists in the transitive and dynamic relational properties which make up the "fringe". These relational features of experience are vitally important to our cognitive practices, and are utilised extensively in James's theory of reference. Though relying solely on experience to explain objective reference and reality might seem to commit James to a kind of subjectivism or solipsism, I have argued that James has a notion of objective reality available to him, and some reasons to prefer his account over others.

I have not defended radical empiricism from all possible criticisms, only those which are pertinent to the project of this thesis. In the following chapters I shall aim to present and defend an account of James's ethics which shares several features with radical empiricism, and there are several aspects of his metaphysics which we should keep in mind going forward. First, the notion that reality is experiential, but not by this fact subjective; second, the reality and cognitive role of experienceable relations; thirdly, experience's capacity to self-unify through these relations, without an appeal to a trans-experiential substance or agency; fourthly, an account of reference which does not require anything outside of the experiential stream; fifthly, radical empiricism's capacity to defend the notion of objective reality without appealing to anything non-experiential; and finally, that human activity, conceptualisation, and imagination are not alien from objective reality, but can enter into relations with and even alter it. In Part II, and especially in Chapter VI, I shall suggest that an objective account of morality can be built from James's experiential ethics in much the same way that an objective account of reality can be built from James's experiential metaphysics.

PART II:
JAMESIAN ETHICS

We no longer see man against a backdrop of values, of realities, which transcend him. We picture man as a brave naked will surrounded by an easily comprehended empirical truth. For the hard idea of truth we have substituted the facile idea of sincerity. What we have never had, of course, is a […] theory of man as free and separate and related to a rich and complicated world from which, as a moral being, he has much to learn

Iris Murdoch, *Against Dryness* (1961: 18)

We know so little about the ultimate nature of things, or of ourselves, that it would be sheer folly dogmatically to say that an ideal rational order may not be real. The only objective criterion of reality is coerciveness, in the long run, over thought. […] If judgements of what *should-be* are fated to grasp us in this way, they are what "correspond" [to reality].

William James (1878, EPh: 21)
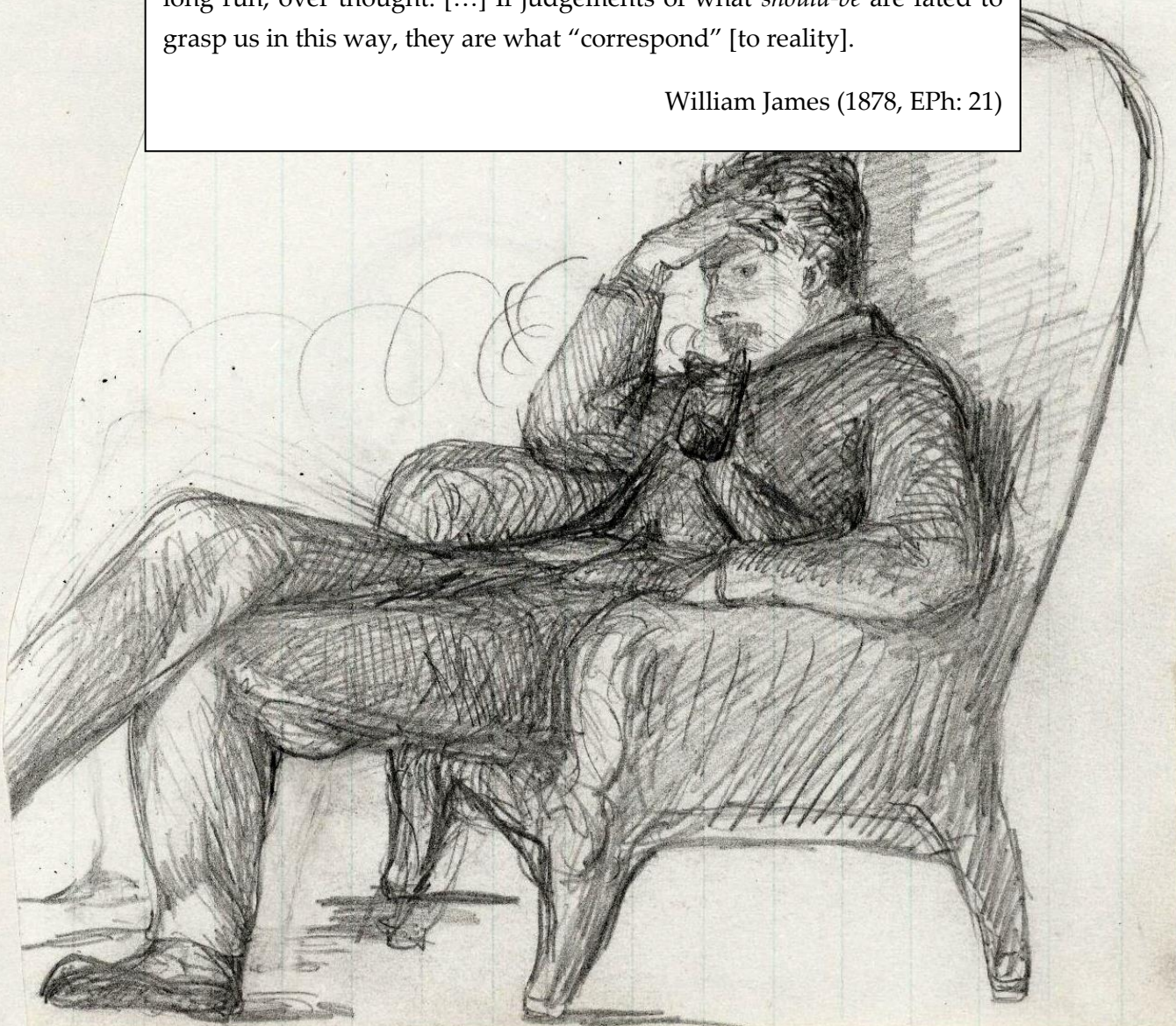
CHAPTER V:

ATTENTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

§1. INTRODUCTION: INTERPRETING JAMES'S ETHICS

Much like James's metaphysics, James's ethics aims to give us a full account of our moral relations, motivations, and obligations, without referring to anything other than experience. This chapter aims to present James's ethics in this light, with particular attention to James's notion of "demand", and to why James asserts that each demand carries with it an obligation to be met.

This chapter will mainly focus on "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" (1891), the paper in which James most clearly presents his ethical position. Explicating this position fully, though, will require drawing from other works, most notably his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), some of his other early papers published in *Will to Believe and Other Essays* (1897), and some of James's lectures from *Talks to Teachers and Students* (1899).

James's attempt to provide an account of ethics which appeals only to experience often leads him to make subjectivist sounding expressions. I'll mostly let this apparent subjectivism go unchallenged in this chapter, but in the next we'll see not only that James feels the need for objectivity within his account, but that as his career progresses, he makes more and more attempts to capture this objectivity. As it is my contention that the best way to account for this objectivity in James's ethics is by appeal to his radical

empiricism, in this chapter and especially the next I'll draw parallels between his ethics and his metaphysics.[1]

The chapter starts with an overview of James's ethics and two other common interpretations of it (§1). We'll move on to speculating about what James means by "ideals" and "demands" (§2), and the role that attention plays in the formation of reality and the self (§3). We'll examine the strange claim by James that *willing x* and *believing x* are essentially the same mental event (§4), before examining the claim that "good" is the satisfaction of "demand" (§5). We'll then look at the importance of James's notion of "effort" (§6), before finally turning to James's notion of obligation (§7).

This first section aims to give a brief overview of the ethical position which James presents in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" (1891), as well as two common interpretations of this position. I will argue that both interpretations are insufficient, and will go on in later sections to argue for my own interpretation. The first section focuses on presenting James's position in outline (§1.1); the second focuses on the utilitarian interpretation of James (§1.2); and the third section explores a recent suggestion that James does not, in fact, present an ethical theory at all (§1.3).

§1.1 AN OUTLINE OF JAMESIAN ETHICS IN "THE MORAL PHILOSOPHER"

In "The Moral Philosopher", James aims to present an account of ethics which rejects any possibility of *a priori* ethical theorising, or any account of ethics in which we can appeal to external standards of validity for determining what is good, right, or obligatory. Instead, James wants to present an account in which the meaning of these notions and the validity of our various claims is determined within the experience of moral agents, and within the ongoing experience of the human race as we inquire into ethical matters.

James separates three different ethical questions. The first is what he calls the *psychological* question, and concerns the *origin* of moral intuitions. The second is the *metaphysical* question, and concern the *meaning* of terms such as "good" and "obligation".

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[1] In this chapter, we'll be dealing mostly with James's notion of the self, and the things which are felt to be significant in people's individual lived worlds. In the language presented in Chapter II, this counts as "firstness". We will also see that, for James, obligation is a matter of an inter-personal connection between people, rather than adherence to an external standard. This is a clear case of the "ethical secondness" which we saw lacking in Peirce. In the next chapter, we'll see the role such inter-personal interactions play in our ongoing moral inquiry (secondness), and how objectivity in moral inquiry can be reached on James's view (thirdness).

The third is the *casuistic* question, and concerns the possibility of finding general rules and principles prescribing right action.

In answering the psychological question, James denies that there is any common origin or content to the various things that human beings consider to be "good". James rejects evolutionary accounts and utilitarian accounts on the grounds that they try to reduce complex moral experience to just one aspect. He maintains that many of our moral and aesthetic judgements of value cannot be reduced to what is evolutionarily advantageous, socially useful, or pleasurable (1891, WB: 144-5). We'll look at this more closely when we look at James's rejection of utilitarianism (§1.2).

Concerning the metaphysical question, James first rejects reductive naturalism. According to James, "good" and "obligation" are not terms which can find any meaning in a purely "inorganic" world. One solely physical world cannot be considered better than any other, unless we are surreptitiously bringing into the evaluation the judgement of some living thing. "Goodness, badness, and obligation", James tells us, "must be *realized* somewhere in order to really exist", and the only place which they can be realised is in the consciousness of some organism (1891, WB: 145). Just like in his later metaphysics, James suggests that the *esse* of these notions is *percipi* (1891, WB: 147).

Goods and obligations, then, are ontologically dependent on living and experiencing organisms.[2] James switches between subjectivist vocabulary, which places goods "in" the subjective consciousness of some organism, and relational vocabulary, in which the goods are realised in these organisms' relation to their environment. However, when we consider James's later radical empiricism, the distinction between these options seems less obvious. Under radical empiricism, consciousness *is* a relation between an organism and its environment.[3] With this in mind, I think we should interpret James's statements that a good has status "in" the consciousness of some sentient being, as the statement that goods are relational, and are realised in a being's interaction with its environment. This is clearer when we think of James's statement that "good" is the satisfaction of some "demand" which we place on our environment (§5).

In a world in which only one sentient being exists, a situation which James calls a "moral solitude", that being is the sole arbiter of what is good. By feeling something to be right or good, it makes it right or good, as it is the "sole creator of values in that universe"

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[2] It is worth clarifying that goods being ontologically dependent on living beings does *not* necessarily commit James to moral anti-realism in the sense we are interested in in this thesis, as many interpreters, for instance Slater (2009: 75-76), seem to assume. It does, however, exclude a *type* of moral realism, in which moral properties are real because ontologically independent of living beings.

[3] Consciousness, in radical empiricism, is a relation between two portions of experience: "Consciousness connotes a kind of external relation, and does not denote a special stuff or way of being" (1903, ERE: 14). See Chapter IV.

(1891, WB: 146). Once again, this seems like a very subjective statement. But, as we'll see, even in a moral solitude this sole organism is constrained by facts about its nature, facts about its environment, relations various ideals can have to one another, and properties of the experiences it has (such as the felt urgency of some features of it) (§7.2). Distinguished from this moral solitude, a world in which there are multiple beings making claims on each other is a world in which "obligation" emerges. The notion of "good" depends on a relation of one organism to its environment, and the notion of "obligation" depends on more than one organism making demands on each other (1891, WB: 147).[4] Exactly what this notion of obligation amounts to is something it will take most of this chapter to articulate (§7).

In neither the case of "good" nor the case of "obligation" does James refer to an external standard which grounds the validity of our claims about goodness and obligation. A being judges something to be good, therefore it is good (for it). A being makes a personal demand on its environment or on another being, therefore there is a (*prima facie*) obligation to meet that demand. Whether we meet the demand depends on our own personal responsiveness to this demand (1891, WB; 149). The validity of these goods and obligations is not decided by appeal to some standard external to our experience, but can only be decided in the long run of the experience of the race as a whole, over the course of generations, through conversation and experiments (1891, WB: 157). Validity, inquiry, and objectivity will be the topic of the next chapter.

The third, "casuistic", question concerns the possibility of finding a general rule or principle for determining the right thing to do in particular situations. Such a principle would be easy to find if there were some common content to what was generally demanded, or considered good. But James argues that no such commonality can be found, leading him to the conclusion that the only possible general principle is the most general principle: that the "*essence of good is to satisfy demand*". These demands have no common content, they can be for "anything under the sun", and so we cannot appeal to any "single abstract principle" to determine what is right (1891, WB: 153).

The desire for a principle to govern our moral lives is not merely abstract, of course, but practical. Were we to live in an ideal world, every demand would be satisfied. But this is impossible. Many demands are incompatible, and so we need at least *some* guiding principle for helping us in concrete situations. Seeing as every demand carries an obligation to be met, James's suggestion is that the only guiding principle that we can appeal to is one of *inclusivity*, of trying to create a world in which as many demands as possible are satisfied (1891, WB: 155). There is only one "unconditional commandment",

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[4] Later in "The Moral Philosopher", James reneges on his statement that obligation only emerges between different organisms, suggesting that even in a moral solitude, the self of one day would make demands on the self of another, and that some of these demands would be more imperative than others (1891, WB: 159) (§7.2).

James tells us, and this is "that we should seek incessantly […] so to vote and to act as to bring about the very largest total universe of good which we can see". In a real sense, though, abstract principles cannot help us in particular situations. Each situation is unique, and the world we create by deciding on which demands to meet and which to ignore is also unique (1891, WB: 158; see VII.2.1).

The outcome of James's paper is that it is not possible to produce absolute moral concepts and principles *a priori*. Rather "just like physical science", ethics must "bide its time, and be ready to revise its conclusions day to day" (1891, WB: 157). We generate concepts and principles through empirical moral inquiry, not through pure reason. And it is humanity as a whole, not just philosophers, who are involved in this inquiry. Through discourse, argument, observation, and living according to certain ideals, people are deciding "through actual experiment" what is actually good, and by "by what sort of conduct the maximum amount of good can be gained and kept in this world" (1891, WB: 157). In each situation, we are deciding which ideals to keep, which to reject, and how various ideals can co-exist and interact. These decisions are made through conversation, and through the "aid of the experience of other [people]" (1891, WB: 158).

§1.2 THE REJECTION OF UTILITARIANISM

Given this account of ethics, many commentators have suggested that James is a kind of utilitarian. James's free use of the word "desire" in the place of "demand", for instance, gives the impression that he equates the two, which leads to the idea that he is some form of desire-satisfaction utilitarian. Or we might understand "demand" as being synonymous with "preference", and so interpret James as a kind of preference utilitarian. I think we have reason to reject seeing James as *any* kind of utilitarian, not least because of James's explicit repudiation of this position.[5]

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[5] Perry (1935) is usually seen as the first to defend a utilitarian interpretation of James's moral theory (1935, 2: 263-6). More recently, Gale's influential interpretation equates "demand" with "desire", and sees James as a kind of desire-satisfaction utilitarian (1999: 35-4; 2005: 21). Talisse and Aikin (2011) appear to follow this interpretation, though they also observe that the resulting utilitarianism conflicts with James pluralism (2011: 4-5). Other theorists postulate different kinds of utilitarianism. Madden (1979) suggests that James is a need-satisfaction utilitarian (1979: xxx-xxxiii). Myers (1986) agrees that James rejects hedonic utilitarianism, but suggests that he holds a version of utilitarianism which "declares the moral act as that which maximises the good, which consists in satisfying the maximum number of moral beliefs" (Myers, 1986: 586n29). See below for a comment on this. Slater (2009; 2011) suggests that James is some kind of utilitarian, but remains neutral on whether he is a desire-satisfaction utilitarian or an ideal-satisfaction utilitarian, calling him a "demand-satisfaction utilitarian" without clarifying the nature of

These utilitarian accounts generally make two claims. Firstly, they assume that "demand" covers a single measurement of value, be it pleasure, desire, or preference. In this way, James's claim that good is the satisfaction of demand is interpreted as a claim about all goods sharing some common content. Secondly, they assume that our sole ethical obligation is to maximise this content. I think we have reasons to deny both claims.

One good reason to reject the first claim is that James clearly rejects the idea that there is *any* single measure of value. This is the primary reason James rejects traditional hedonistic accounts of utilitarianism. They attempt to reduce the complexity of our moral lives to pleasure:

> [T]he Benthams, the Mills, and the Bains have done a lasting service in taking so many of our human ideals and showing how they must have arisen from the association with acts of simple bodily pleasures and reliefs from pain. Association with many remote pleasures will unquestionably make a thing significant of goodness in our minds […] But it is surely impossible to explain all our sentiments and preferences in this simple way (1891, WB: 143).

Association with pleasure, or utility, can be usefully thought of as *marks* that something is valuable and good, but they cannot adequately *explain* why a thing is valuable and good.[6] Pain and pleasure can certainly play a role in our moral lives, but our moral lives cannot be reduced to pleasure maximisation.

As an example of moral facts which are not reducible to pleasure or utility, James introduces the notion of "brain born intuitions". Brain born intuitions regard "directly felt fitnesses between things", which "often fly in the teeth of all the prepossessions of habit and presumptions of utility". Certain pleasures, such as artistic contemplation,

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"demands" (2009: 80; see 2011: 80). Perhaps most sensibly, Cooper (2003) rejects any claims that James is a utilitarian, but holds that he is a "modest consequentialist", in the "unpresumptuous sense that morality is about making things go better" (2003: 412; see 2002: 225; 233). The melioristic ethics which James presents is clearly consequentialist in this modest sense, but even this claim is complicated by James's frequent appeals to deontological sounding intuitions (VI.2.4). Finally, Putnam and Putnam (1990) connect James's theory with utilitarianism in the sense that he connects the rightness of some act with the opinion of the majority. However, they correctly point out that James avoids the arbitrariness of such a connection by utilising the pragmatist theory of truth, in which, through "strenuous moral inquiry […] conducted through democratic debate and practical testing in the social arena", the opinion of the majority indicates the objective desirability of some act (1990: 226). Utilitarianism in any conventional sense, however, would conflict with James's anti-reductionism and pluralism, as Ruth Anna Putnam makes clear (1997: 271).

[6] We see a similar move in James's "Sentiment of Rationality" in which he suggests that fluidity is a *mark* of the rationality of some conception, but does not suggest that it is *constitutive* of that rationality (1882, WB: 57-8).

cannot be reduced to utility. Certain judgements, such as something being *vulgar* or *mean*, cannot be explained by appealing to consequences (1891, WB: 143-144). Though pleasure might accompany the satisfaction of our various demands, purposes, and intentions, this in no way means that pleasure is our sole motivation (1890, PP 2: 1156).[7] We will examine the nature and role of these spontaneous intuitions in the next chapter (VI.2.4).

James's resistance to our moral experience being reduced to any one type of value or motivation is precisely why he makes his definition of "demand" deliberately ambiguous:

> [A] demand may be for anything under the sun. There is really no more ground for supposing that all our demands can be accounted for by one universal underlying kind of motive than there is ground for supposing that all physical phenomena are cases of a single law. The elementary forces in ethics are probably as plural as those of physics are. The various ideals have no common character apart from the fact that they are ideals (1891, WB: 153).[8]

The satisfaction of demand may be good, but "demands" have no common content. Just like James's notion of "experience" in his metaphysics, his notion of "demand" is meant to be content-neutral. We'll see later that the neutrality of "demand" even extends to a neutrality between belief and desire (§4).

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[7] Myer's quotes the following from James's unpublished notebooks:

> A man loses no sense of worth if he misses a pleasure; he does if he fails in his duty. Utilitarianism may explain how certain things come more than others to pertain to the sphere of conscience, but the psychological question is: What is the origin and the meaning of the particular *quality* of feeling which we call conscience?

James here is clearly criticising the utilitarian or consequentialist position for being unable to account for the origin of a notion of obligation or duty. We will be returning to James's notion of obligation in this (§7) and the following chapters (VII.2.2; 2.4). Myers points out the notebook where this entry is found is dated from 1869-1890, so it is hard to date this particular passage, but thinks it likely that it was written closer to 1890 (Myers, 1986: 587n41). Gale comments on the tension between James's deontological intuitions regarding duty and obligation, and his utilitarian comments about maximising desire, calling this the "maximising-deontological aporia" (Gale, 1999: 48). I suspect this "aporia" emerges out of Gale's determination to interpret James as a desire-satisfaction utilitarian, rather than from a genuine tension in James's text. As we shall see, James has room for a notion of obligation which does not conflict with the rest of his ethics.

[8] Note that James appears to use "demands" and "ideals" interchangeably in this passage, and that *neither* are considered as having common content. See §2.2.

We might consider there to be more evidence for the "maximisation" claim. James tells us that the only guiding principle we can appeal to is "to satisfy at all times *as many demands as we can*" (1891, WB: 155). We are told that it is only by experiment that we can determine "by what conduct the maximum amount of good can be gained and kept", indicating that the maximisation of good might be the aim of moral inquiry. And James has also told us that our single "unconditional commandment" is to bring about a world in which as many different demands as possible are realised (1891, WB: 158).

It is worth remembering that James says all of these things in the context of addressing philosophers, and offering a guiding principle *for philosophers*. James contrasts "philosophers" on the one hand with "champion[s] of one particular ideal" on the other (1891, WB: 155). Whereas most people will be biased towards certain ideals, the philosopher *qua* philosopher is meant to be impartial. As such, this guiding principle is not necessarily meant to be applied to everybody, in their practical moral lives, but might just be applicable to those people aiming to be impartial. The "philosopher" in this text means someone who seeks for unity in our various moral demands and relations. James's "maximisation" suggestion here, then, can be seen as more of a therapeutic one. He is telling "the philosopher" to seek unity in multiplicity and plurality, rather than in one common principle.

James doesn't tell us why the philosopher, or any one, should be aiming for a world in which a multiplicity of different demands are realised. One way to think about this is that James privileges *richness*.[9] A world in which a diverse array of values are realised is better than one in which only one value is dominant. Exactly *why* James makes this judgement is unclear. It might be an aesthetic judgement, or we might have some ethical obligation to maintaining diversity in our moral landscape. Another way to think about the claim that we ought to aim for diversity in our moral lives is epistemic. The more plausible hypotheses about the good which we allow, the more likely it is that we will reach satisfying answers in our ethical inquiry. This gives us an epistemic, rather than an ethical, reason to maintain and encourage diversity. But, as we will see, James often conflates the ethical and the epistemic. One final reason why we might have a reason for encouraging diversity in our moral landscape is more abstract. We might infer that if we have an obligation to satisfy *each* demand, then we have a duty to satisfy *every* demand. James doesn't think that anybody but the "philosopher" operates at this level of abstraction. Obligation is a fundamentally inter-personal thing (§7). Still, as a guiding

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[9] See, for instance, James's claims in "Reflex Action and Theism" (1881):

> The only possible duty there can be in the matter is the duty of getting the richest results that the material will allow (1881, WB: 103).

Seeing as we cannot be passive, and must shape the environment in some way, we might as well shape it so that it is as "rich" as possible.

principle, the idea that every demand in principle deserves to be met might be useful in enabling sympathetic engagement with other people's demands.

I don't want to spend too much time on James's criticism of utilitarianism here.[10] But what is clear is that James does criticise both the notion that we can reduce our moral experience to one type of value, and the notion that we can appeal to one abstract casuistic scale to determine our moral obligations. James, as in all areas of his philosophy, shows himself to be suspicious of any claim that general principles will capture everything which is important about particular situations.

§1.3 THE ETHICS OF ENERGY

A second contemporary interpretation of James's ethics correctly rejects the utilitarian interpretation, but instead interprets James as rejecting the possibility of *any* moral theory. Franzese (2008) offers the most obvious example of this type of interpretation.[11] According to Franzese, James's aim in "The Moral Philosopher" is to engage in "a critical analysis of the validity of any moral theory […] rather than presenting another specific moral theory", and his conclusion is "essentially negative", setting out to "show the futility" of the philosophical project of forming an objective moral theory (Franzese, 2008: 3).

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[10] See Franzese (2008: 23ff.) for a good criticism of the utilitarian interpretation of James's ethics.

[11] The first (or at least the most famous) pragmatist to make this claim about James's philosophy was Richard Rorty:

> as long as we see James or Dewey as having "theories of truth" or "theories of knowledge" or "theories of morality" we shall get them wrong (Rorty, 1982: 160).

More recently, Marchetti appears to follow Franzese's interpretation. He correctly rejects the utilitarian interpretation of James's ethics, but holds that:

> James is neither interested in advancing *any theory of morality whatsoever*, nor in individuating the principles of human nature on which such an ethics should be erected (Marchetti, 2010: 127, emphasis mine).

Marchetti, unlike Franzese, does think that James holds that "values, like facts, are *in the* world" but denies that any moral theory can guide or shape our perception of, and reflection on, these values (Marchetti, 2010: 140). See Marchetti (2015a) for a book length defence of what he calls James's "hortatory" ethics.

Franzese argues that:

> we need to resist the temptation to look for or to draw from [James] a set
> of rules or prescriptions of a practical solutions for particular problems.
> It is James's insight that an ethics, or a moral theory, is to be suggestive
> more than imperative, hortatory more than prescriptive (Franzese 2008:
> 10).

There is a great deal to agree with in Franzese's interpretation. Franzese directs attention to places in James's work which are frequently overlooked, and it is certainly true that part of James's task in "The Moral Philosopher" is to explore the limits of theoretical ethical philosophy. It is also clear that James does not want to give his readers a set of prescriptive ethical rules to follow. And Franzese rightly emphases the importance of "historical process" over "theorising" in James's account (Franzese, 2008: 27). Nonetheless, there seems to be a less radical way to do justice to the passages Franzese draws from. James definitely seems to reject the possibility of two things: any moral theory "dogmatically made up in advance", and any moral theory in which one philosopher alone articulates a set of moral prescriptions. Let's take these two points in turn.

Firstly, we can see James's rejection of *a priori* ethics as an obvious result of his empiricism. It is true that James rejects any system of ethics built on *a priori* abstract principles, in favour of an empirical system of ethics which, just like physics, is ready to revise itself in light of experience from day to day (1891, WB: 157). But this does not result in the rejection of *all* moral theory. James no more rejects the possibility of moral theory than he does the possibility of a theory of physics. He just wants that theory to emerge over time through attention to real moral experience, and for its conclusions to be held as fallible and revisable in the light of subsequent experience.

Regarding the second point, it is true that James rejects the role of the moral philosopher as an absolute authority on moral matters. The moral philosopher can never tell us absolutely what is right and wrong. Philosophers, just like everyone else, are partial:

> The very best of men must not only be insensible, but be ludicrously and
> peculiarly insensible, to many goods (1891, WB: 154).

As a champion of those goods which they *are* sensible to, the philosopher is just like anyone else. As a moral theorist, the philosopher *qua* philosopher must be impartial. Conflating these two stances results in the kind of dogmatic ethics which James is concerned about.[12] But this does not remove every role for the moral theorist. We need

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[12] James, for instances, ask us to imagine

> individual moralists, no longer as mere schoolmasters, but as pontiffs armed
> with the temporal power, and having authority in every concrete case of conflict

to be able to generate and evaluate conceptual resources for dealing with moral situations. We need the possibility of a broader vision of our ethical landscape. And we need to provide some kind of reasonable account of objectivity in our moral dealings, and an account of what obligations we should meet over others when goods conflict.[13]

In short, then, James is describing the *limitations* of theoretical reasoning in ethics, not its *impossibility*. James himself (as we'll see) is keen to offer an account of what the nature of obligation and good is; the virtues which are required to engage in successful moral inquiry; how our moral ideals can have some real reference; and how the outcome of inquiry is legitimate and not arbitrary. It seems as if there is a positive *and* a negative message in James's "The Moral Philosopher", then, whereas Franzese only sees the negative.

Though Franzese rejects the possibility of a Jamesian moral theory, he does suggest that James has a kind of inchoate and "anthropological" account of ethics which Franzese calls "the ethics of energy". Once again, when presenting this view Franzese brings our attention to some ethically relevant elements of James's work which are customarily overlooked. But the resulting position is problematically subjectivist.

According to the "ethics of energy", we feel the meaning of our lives most clearly when we are struggling against perceived evil in the service of some ideal. Morality is a matter of sustaining an energetic, earnest, or "strenuous" approach to our lives. Here's Franzese, presenting this view in clearly moralistic terms:

> Thus the dyad energy-entropy, activity-passivity, acquires in James a full moral value: roughly speaking, energy/activity is structurally "good", entropy/passivity is structurally "evil," or, to put it another way, from the ethical standpoint the acts that display an increase or a surplus of energy are "good," whereas those that show a low or decreasing level of energy are "bad" (Franzese 2008: 192).

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to order which good shall be butchered and which shall be suffered to survive — and the notion really turns one pale. All one's slumbering revolutionary instincts waken at the thought of any single moralist wielding such powers of life and death. Better chaos forever than an order based on any closet-philosopher's rule, even though he were the most enlightened possible member of his tribe (1891, WB: 155).

Even the most enlightened philosopher will be insensitive to a vast array of goods (VI.3.4).
[13] We'll return to all of these issues in the next chapter.

According to this view, James is presenting a kind of existential or Nietzschean account of morality, in which it is "good" to be energetic, active, and to exercise our various powers, and it is bad to be entropic, passive, or to have our powers limited.[14]

Again, it is certainly true that James has a great deal to say about energy, attitude, and their relation to our moral lives.[15] But to suggest that our moral lives are *solely* governed by notions of energy is highly problematic. This account gives us no normative standard, outside of the energy an ideal can give to us, by which to assess our ideals. *Any* ideal can be adopted and felt to be energising in the requisite way. Ideals such as racial superiority, nationalism, and personal wealth accumulation are difficult to realise, and acting under them can allow people to lead strenuous and earnest lives full of energy. But we would presumably think that people would be *wrong* to be energised by those ideals.[16]

Franzese's "ethics of energy" is also unable to account for some of the more distinctively pragmatist elements of James's ethics. As we shall see, James places a great deal of emphasis on attending to people who have differing ideals, practicing moral and epistemic tolerance, and adopting a fallibilism towards our own ideals. All these notions seem incompatible with an ethics which foregrounds energy alone.[17]

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[14] Later, Franzese appears to suggest that what makes his anthropological account normative rather than descriptive is the role of energy in cultural creation:

> The energetic ethics indeed originates from the anthropological axiom of the primacy of action, but it acquires its ethical and moral form from its destiny as the drive to transform the natural into cultural world, a project which constitutes the very peculiarity of the human condition. Insofar as human beings exist in the tension between nature and culture, the evaluation of constructive and creative power. Thus, "good" must be anti-entropic action, that shows a major organized and constructive power; that is, an action is good if we see that it possess[es] a high level of energy and is intended as an affirmation of human ideals in the construction of a human world. Conversely, "evil" is the loss of power – passive acquiescence in the *status quo* – the fading away of human energy into the mechanism of nature (Franzese 2008: 207).

It is unclear why moving to a "cultural" rather than "natural" sphere of action by itself allows an account of normativity to be given exclusively in terms of energy.

[15] See VI.3.8

[16] Franzese does seem to address this issue, but it is unclear to what effect. He recognises that to avoid this problematic conclusion, that "energy taken by itself cannot be considered as a source of moral value". Instead, the "moral qualification" of such energy emerges from "human ideals and culture, which still provide the normative frame of action". But, according to Franzese, this requirement represents a problem for James's project, as it involves being lead back to the kind of moral theory he is meant to have rejected in "The Moral Philosopher" (2008: 198- 199).

[17] One way of putting this, in the vocabulary I laid out in Chapter II, is that Franzese focuses solely on *ethical firstness*. It is true that James places great importance on what Franzese calls "energy". But this is not James's sole concern. James provides us with an account that tries to do justice to firstness, secondness, *and* thirdness. As we'll see, "secondness", or the importance of inter-

Considering the insufficiency of these two options, the interpretation which I offer in this thesis accepts neither the standard utilitarian interpretation of James's ethics, nor the recent interpretation of James as a thinker fundamentally uninterested in truth, objectivity, or any kind of moral theory. I will now turn to presenting my own interpretation.[18]

§2. DEMANDS AND IDEALS

In this section I take a closer look at the nature of "demands", by looking at places other than "The Moral Philosopher" in which James presents his ethical view. I start by clarifying some terminology (§2.1); look at an account in which James specifies what he means by the connected notion of "ideals" (§2.2); and explore three earlier places where James appears to rehearse the view he presents in "Moral Philosopher" (§2.3). This will be the first of three sections in which I try to elaborate the nature of "demands" (§2-4), until we can finally give an indication of why the satisfaction of "demands" are good (§5).

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personal interaction in James, comes out when we look at the notion of ethical obligation, and "thirdness" comes out when we look at the discovery of moral objectivity, and the formation of the moral universe.

[18] The closest interpretation to my own in the existing literature on James's ethics is presented in a general sketch by Ruth Anna and Hilary Putnam:

> James […] takes the same approach to ethics as he does to common sense and science. Here too, he thinks, there are procedures which can be imperfectly characterized and which might be improved in the course of ethical inquiry itself […] *He tries to change our philosophical sensibility*, rather than to replace one foundationalist ethical project with another, on the one hand, or to convince us that ethics is "non-cognitive" on the other (Putnam and Putnam, 1990: 223).

James offer us an account of ethics which does not assert *a priori* moral truths or methods, nor fundamentalist claims of the good, but nonetheless allows truths, concepts, theories, and methodologies to emerge *out of* our moral experiences and inquiries.

§2.1 Terminology: Demands, Ideals, and Claims

First, a brief terminological point. James uses "ideals", "demands" and "claims" more or less interchangeably in "The Moral Philosopher", and he certainly does not attempt to clarify this usage. Here is how I intend to use this vocabulary.

James tends to use "ideal" to denote an individual organism or person's perspective on what is valuable (though our ideals can certainly be tied to a wider culture). These ideals or values are relational – in the sense that they are always directed towards some object in an environment, and they are in some sense hypothetical, in the sense that they are subject to revision based on discoverable facts about that environment, about the nature of the ideal, and about one ideal's relation with other ideals. We'll get a clearer idea of what James means by "ideals" in the next section (§2.2)

A "demand" or "claim" is a demand *on* some other thing to conform with or realise these ideals. This might be a demand on your environment in general, that it should conform with what you think as valuable. For human beings, other humans make up a large part of their environment, and their cooperation is often required for the satisfaction of more complex ideals. As a result, "demands" are usually directed at other people. James tends to use "claims" when he is talking about explicit demands between two or more people, and "demand" in the more general sense. We can "demand" that the world be rational or moral, for instance (1884, WB: 115), but we might not make a "claim" to this effect on anybody in particular.[19]

The reason James uses these terms interchangeably is that in many ways they cover the *same basic notion*, but in different contexts. Demands just *are* ideals. There is something deficient with holding an ideal – holding that something in the environment is valuable – and *not* acting under this ideal. A person who professes certain ideals but does not act under them is someone we find "contemptible", according to James (1899, TT: 164). And acting under these ideals involves *demanding* of the environment (often including other people) the satisfaction of that ideal. So, an ideal fully held, in a pragmatic sense, *is* a demand.[20]

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[19] Here is an example of the conflation. In "Moral Philosopher" James talks about the "ideal" of the philosopher being the discovery (or creation) of a stable system in the apparently chaotic world of moral relations (1891, WB: 141-2). Later, he talks about the philosophers "demand" that the world be found to be such a stable unity (1891, WB: 150).

[20] Another way of putting this is that "ideals" and "demands" are the same basic relation to the world, expressed with a different degree of emphasis. This will become clearer when we bring in the "faith-ladder" to make sense of demands (§4). We can say an "ideal" is at the stage of the faith-ladder in which we claim that "*x* ought to be the case", and "demand" is at the stage of the faith-ladder in which we claim that "*x shall* be the case".

In what follows, I'll be using "demands" as a catch-all term including "ideals", "demands" and "claims", unless it is particularly important to separate these in particular sections.[21]

§2.2 IDEALS AND SIGNIFICANCE

Talking about "ideals" in "What Makes Life Significant" (1898), James gives us several identifying qualities. He suggests that ideals must be: (1) "intellectually conceived"; that (2) we must be conscious, or capable of being conscious, of them; that they (3) must have "that sort of outlook, uplift, and brightness that go with all intellectual facts"; and that (4) ideals must appear to be novel to the people holding them ("routine is incompatible with ideality, although what is sodden routine for one person may be ideal novel for another").[22] All of which leads James to suggest that (5) ideals are "relative to the lives that entertain them" (1898, TT: 163).[23]

So far, this means that "mere ideals are the cheapest things in life" (1898, TT: 163). Everyone carries with them some ideals. But this is just to take ideals in the abstract. Ideals are also (6) *calls to action*. We tend to think that people who refuse to *act* under their ideals are "contemptible" (1898, TT: 164). Acting under our ideals is necessary for them to be significant in the full sense, and also if other people are going to recognise them as legitimate (ibid).

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[21] Suckiel is one scholar who has noticed the ambiguity in James's notion of demand. On her view, he uses "demand" to mean felt interest, a judgement of good, and an imperative, in the sense of an "order or dictate or command that one receives something, or that some state of affairs comes to pass" (Suckiel 1982: 49-50). I argue later that in some sense understanding a demand in terms of an affirmation covers all of these features (§2.3; §3.1). Myers too recognises the conflation, though he thinks that both *demand* and *claim* are connected with "concepts of feeling and desiring", and so interprets *desire* as the base concept in James's ethics, against James's adoption of the deliberately ambiguous term "demand" as primitive (Myers, 1986: 403). Putnam and Putnam just understand "demand" as meaning "value", which might be closest to the truth, though they do not elaborate on this reading (1990: 224).

[22] See R. Putnam (1997: 291-297) for an exploration of James's conception of ideals, and in what sense they must be "novel". I detail my own position below (VI.3.3).

[23] The presentation of "ideals" here seems quite intellectualised. James's project in this paper is to account for the significance of *human* life. But the significance, and "ideals" in other organisms is not too far from this definition. James is quite clear that even "polyps" and other very primitive creatures have *minds*, consciousness, and even *concepts* or pro-concepts, and have lived worlds and so ideals in the sense which is relevant here (e.g. 1879, EPh: 18; 1879-80, MEN: 177; 1890, PP 1: 277; 428; 1892, PB: 211).

In "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" (1898), James gives us a very broad and subjective notion of what it is for us to find something to be *significant* or *important*:

> Wherever a process of life communicates an eagerness to him who lives it, there the life becomes genuinely significant (1898, TT: 134).

There are two important notions here which James does not elaborate on: *a process of life* and *eagerness*. We have to assume that by "process of life", James just means *ways* of life, or *types* of life, or a certain kind of *lived world*. In this passage, James is talking about the distinctions between his own life and that of the mountaineers of North Carolina, how different values were available within each context, but also how each context renders people blind to the values of another context.[24] We have to assume that this "lived world" or this "context" is what James means by a process of life.

"Eagerness" refers to a feeling which can be brought on by physical activity, mental activity, perception, or imagination. Some portion of our experience communicates itself or presents itself in an urgent way. James tells us that

> wherever [this eagerness] it is found, there is the zest, the tingle, the excitement, of reality; and there *is* "importance" in the only real and positive sense (1898, TT: 135).

Importance or significance, then, means portions of our experience giving rise to a sense of eagerness or what will be later called "urgency".

So far this only describes what it is for us for something to be subjectively important. In order for significance to be "communicable and publicly recognisable", we need not just this sense of inner eagerness and urgency, but the virtues required to labour under them, and attempt to realise them in reality (1898, TT: 164). The attitude it takes to actively attempt to realise ideals, even at the expense of personal satisfactions, is what James calls the "strenuous mood". We'll say more about this mood later (§6; VI.3.8).

James has connected finding an object to be significant in this sense with a feeling of *reality* (1898, TT: 135). Feeling some object to be significant makes it real from a certain subjective perspective. Our subjective realities are made up of the things which we find significant in this sense. To coin a term, I shall call these subjective realities "lived worlds". What this all means will become clearer in the following sections (§2.3; §3). But it is worth mentioning here that a particular object being found to be important or significant only makes sense in the context of a lived world. If we pluck an object of significance out of its context in this world, out of the actual and potential relations it has with other practical realities, it becomes very hard to apprehend its value. We can apply James's distinction between *static* and *dynamic* meaning to understand this better:

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[24] See VI.3.4

> Each word, in […] a sentence, is felt, not only as a word, but as having a *meaning*. The "meaning" of a word taken thus dynamically in a sentence may be quite different from its meaning when taken statically or without context. The dynamic meaning is usually reduced to the bare fringe we have described, of felt suitability or unfitness to the context and conclusion (1890, PP 1: 255).[25]

Just like when a word is taken out of a sentence, or a quote is taken out of its context, when a valuable object is taken out of the context of its felt relations with other meaningful elements of a lived world (which James here identifies with the fringe), that object loses much of the dynamic and relational meaning which give it significance. This distinction between "dynamic" and "static" meaning will be useful to keep in mind when we come to look at obligation (§7).

Acting under our ideal, and actually striving to bring it about within a wider reality, is what gives our ideal the fullest and deepest significance. This is what James refers to as "progress":

> [T]he thing of deepest – or, at any rate, of comparatively deepest – significance in life does seem to be its character of *progress*, or that strange union of reality with ideal novelty which it continues from one moment to another to present (1898, TT: 164).

This isn't, *yet*, an objective notion of moral progress. But it does tell us that for human ideals to be significant, objectively, they must be acted under in a way that can be seen as moral progress.[26]

§2.3 THREE PRIOR ACCOUNTS

We've seen that James uses "demand" in a deliberately ambiguous way, such that it is content-neutral (§1.1; §1.2). In the vaguest sense, a demand seems to be a demand *on* something (our environment or some other person) to realise our ideals, which we've now seen are things which we hold to be particularly significant (§2.2). We still need some clarification on exactly what these demands are, in order to understand why their satisfaction counts as good, and why each demand comes with an obligation to be met.

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[25] See IV.2.2.

[26] James adds to this the notion that an ideal must be *novel*, not just in subjective feeling but in actuality, in order to represent progress in a more objective sense. We return to the notion of progress in VII.2.4.

Unfortunately, James doesn't give us much information about the nature of demands in "The Moral Philosopher". However, I think we can locate three earlier accounts in which James rehearses his ethical position, and in which we can find some indication about what he means by "demands". The first of these can be found in James's paper "Remarks on Spencer's definition of Mind as Correspondence" (1878), the second in "Are We Automata?" (1879), parts of which found their way into his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), where we also find the third account I'd like to draw on here. [27]

The aim of James's 1878 paper was to deny Spencer's claim that mind was essentially the "*adjustment of inner to outer relations*" (1878, EPh: 7). Spencer aims to provide a reductive explanation of the mind in purely physical, evolutionary terms, as an adjustment of an organism to its environment. James aims to show that "survival" is but one interest among many which govern our minds, others of which cannot be explained in evolutionary terms (for instance: logic, fantasy, humour, taste, decorum, beauty and morality (1878, EPh: 8)). On James's account, the mind is not a *passive* result of outward pressure, but is (also) an active contributor to reality (1878, EPh: 16). There is no escape from the teleological, or end setting, nature of mind. And there is no reason why these ends must be reduced to evolutionary terms, like survival or utility (1878, EPh: 14). Indeed, James claims that Spencer's assertion that it *can* be so reduced is itself a teleological assertion, based on certain materialist assumptions about the way the universe *ought* to be.[28]

It is following the assertion that mind, understood teleologically rather than mechanistically, is an active contributor to the world, that James runs through what might be seen as a prototype for his "Moral Philosopher" position. I quote extensively to show these similarities:

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[27] Chapters V ("The Automaton-Theory") and IX ("The Stream of Thought"). See EPs: 396.

[28] Here's James making this point:

> Is it not already clear to the reader's mind that the whole difficulty in making Mr. Spencer's law work lies in the fact that it is not really a constitutive, but a regulative, law of thought which he is erecting, and that he does not frankly say so? […] every living man would instantly define right thinking as thinking in correspondence with reality. But Spencer, in saying that right thought is that which conforms to existent outward relations, and this exclusively, undertakes to decide what the reality *is*. In other words, under cover of an apparently formal definition he really smuggles in a material definition of the most far-reaching import. […] What is the reality? All the thinking, all the conflict of ideals, going on in the world at the present moment is in some way tributary to this quest. To attempt, therefore, with Mr. Spencer, to decide the matter merely incidentally, to forestall discussion by a definition— to carry the position by surprise, in a word—is a proceeding savoring more of piracy than philosophy (1878, EPh: 15-16).

The truth appears to be that every individual man may, if it please him, set up his private categorical imperative of what rightness or excellence in thought shall consist in, and these different ideals, instead of entering upon the scene armed with a warrant […] appear only as so many brute affirmations left to fight it ought upon the chess-board among themselves. They are, at best, postulates, each of which must depend on the general consensus of experience as a whole to bear out its validity. The formula which proves to have the most massive destiny will be the true one. But this is a point which can only be solved *ambulando*, and not by any *a priori* definition. The attempt to forestall the decision is free to all to make, but all make it at their risk. Our respective hypotheses and postulates help to shape the course of thought, but the only thing which we all agree in assuming is, that thought will be coerced away from them if they are wrong […] [W]e are all fated to be, *a priori*, teleologists whether we will or no. Interests which we bring with us, and simply posit or take our stand upon, are the very flour out of which our mental dough is kneaded. The organism of thought, from the vague dawn of discomfort or ease in the polyp to the intellectual joy of Laplace among his formulas, is teleological through and through. Not a cognition occurs but feeling is there to comment on it, to stamp it as greater or less worth (1878, EPh: 17).

The only objective criterion of reality is coerciveness, in the long run, over thought. Objective facts […] are real only because they coerce sensation. Any interest which should be coercive on the same massive scale would be *eodem jure* real. By its very essence, the reality of a thought is proportionate to the way it grasps us. Its intensity, its seriousness – its interest, in a word – taking these qualities, not at any given instant, but as shown by the total upshot of experience. If judgements of the *should-be* are fated to grasp us in this way, they are what "correspond". The ancients placed the conception of Fate at the bottom of things – deeper than the gods themselves. "The fate of thought," utterly barren and indeterminate as such a formula is, is the only unimpeachable regulative Law of Mind (1878, EPh: 21-22).

There is a great deal to unpack here. First, the similarities with "Moral Philosopher". James is asserting that any picture about what is right or good must be achieved over time, rather than being asserted by *a priori* principles. He asserts that claims about what ought to be the case cannot exist without consciousness (which he here explicitly denotes does not need to be human). He asserts that it is the *interested* stance of some organism through which value becomes apparent, not a disinterested stance. We see the addition of the claim, which will become very important, that the *reality* of some claim about the good is proportionate to the intensity with which we feel it, something which we can connect to *significance,* as defined in the previous section. And he is suggesting that though each of us assert our own ideals and demands, none of these are obviously

correct, but enter into a field of discourse in which it is decided which of these various demands is valid over time and the "total upshot of experience".

James does not talk about "demands" here, but what occupies the space of "demands" are various other terms. James talks about "brute affirmations" or judgements that things *should be* the case. He also refers to these as "hypotheses" and "postulates", the validity of which are to be decided by how coercive they are over thought in the long run. So, we can see the basic bones of the "Moral Philosopher" position articulated here, with "affirmations", "hypotheses", and "postulates" occupying the place of "demands".

In his 1879 paper, James is essentially arguing against the epiphenomenal view of consciousness. To do so, he shows that consciousness has an effect on an organism due to its *selective* power (1879, EPs: 46). From a variety of possible experiences, consciousness selects which elements will be accentuated, and which shall be ignored:

> [T]he mind is at every stage a theatre of simultaneous possibilities. Consciousness consists in the comparison of these with each other, the selection of some, and the suppression of the rest by the reinforcing and inhibiting agency of Attention (1879, EPs: 51)

So, in this second paper, James once again appeals to the selective power of consciousness, here connected with *attention.* We'll see this selective power of attention is central to James's theory of ethics as we go on.

Once again, in this article James briefly runs through, in prototype, many of the ideas which will be expressed in "The Moral Philosopher". He expresses that pure physical matter cannot be "good" or "better", and that "the words Use, Advantage, Interest, Good, find no application in a world in which no consciousness exists". To say that one state of affairs is better or worse than another, we must assume a consciousness in which this comparison can take place. And, at least in what James will later call a "moral solitude", "[w]hat feels good [to this consciousness] *is* good" and in this sense "[t]he judge makes the law while announcing it" (1879, EPs: 44-45). Though this view is still crude, and though James is not interested in expressing what it would be to have objectivity on such an account, we can once again find a lot of similarities with the position which will be expressed in "Moral Philosopher".

In giving this account, James recalls his previous 1878 paper on Spencer, and presents the account he gave there in this way:

> [E]ach consciousness simply *stakes* its ends and challenges the world thereby […] [This is] most conspicuous in the case of what is called Self-love. There the end staked by each mind is peculiar to itself, whilst in respect of other ends many minds may unite in common position. But in their psychological essence these impersonal ends in no wise different

> from self-interest. Abolish the minds to whom they seem good and they
> have no status (EPs: 44n4).

Interestingly, James appears to be saying something quite different in this presentation of his previous paper than we saw him say in the paper itself. Whereas in that paper "postulates" and "hypotheses" played the role that "demands" do in "The Moral Philosopher", here what is occupying the space of "demands" is what James is calling a "challenge" to the world. The notion of a challenge is very different from that of an hypothesis. Hypotheses are belief-like, and aim at verification or refutation. Challenges are more assertive and desire-like, and aim to alter the world to be in line with some subjective interest. We'll return to this apparent confusion between "belief-like" and "desire-like" demands later (especially in §4).

The third place we can find some prior indication of what James might mean by "demand" is in James's *Principles*. Here James, once again, rejects the hedonistic notion that pleasures and pains are the basis of all our actions. Pleasure and pains are certainly "important" features in our motivation, but they are "far from being our only stimuli" and it is a "great mistake" by a "premature philosophy" which would assert that they were (1890, PP 2: 1156). Rather than this, James suggests, as he will do a year later with what he calls "demands", that there are a vast array of different reasons for motivation which have *no common content:*

> [h]owever the actual impulsions may have arisen, they must now be
> described as they exist; and those persons obey a curiously narrow
> teleological superstition who think themselves bound to interpret them
> in every instance as effects of the secret solicitancy of pleasure and
> repugnancy of pain (1890, PP 2: 1157).

Rather than looking for some common psychological or phenomenological content in our various impulses to action, James points to something more formal, "a preliminary phenomenon, the *urgency, namely, with which it is able to compel attention and dominate in consciousness"* (1890, PP 2: 1164). The only relevant feature of the "impelling idea" is simply that it is "the one which possess the attention" (1890, PP 2: 1164). So here James is presenting a content-neutral notion of motivation in terms of *significance* or *urgency,* characterised by the *possessing of the attention.*

From these three accounts, we can get a clearer account of what James might mean by "demands". In each account, we see James asserting the importance of consciousness as a selective agency, rather than a merely passive one. Consciousness selects its materials through *attention.* Here James links attention to some *interest* an organism feels towards some feature of its environment, but he denies that this interest can be reduced to pleasure and pain. In his 1890 account, James suggest the fundamental feature of our various impulses is *significance* and *urgency,* characterised by our attention being absorbed by some feature of our experience. Once we feel some object or element of our

experience to be significant in this way, we assert it to be so. In his 1878 paper, James suggests that we assert or affirm, without prior warrant, some element of experience which we find significant in this sense, and expect others to be coerced (in the long run) by the significance of the object we are asserting. It is in this sense he understood our "brute affirmation" of significance as "hypotheses" or "postulates". These affirmations are in principle public, and ideally coercive over others. In a later re-description, James suggests that these are "challenges" which an organism makes on its environment.[29] We shall see in just a moment that it not carelessness that leads James to assert that one and the same assertion can be belief-like and desire-like. I shall from now on call them "affirmations", as this is neutral between the "hypothesis" and the "challenge" notion.

So, a demand is an *affirmation* of some object, an assertion that some element of experience is and ought to be seen as significant, in the sense of compelling attention and action. We saw in the previous section (§2.2) that James connects significance with felt urgency, and with acting under ideals felt to be significant in this sense. These affirmations are asserted by James to be both "challenges" and "hypotheses". They are challenges in the sense that finding them to be fully significant requires that we act to bring about their realisation in a wider reality. And they are hypotheses in the sense that others, in principle, should be able to feel this significance if they properly attend to the valuable object. As such, we can see that demands have an indexical quality. They *point* to some element of experience which should be seen as valuable, and they *affirm* the value of this object.

In short, I hold that demands in James's sense are *affirmations that some element of experience, when attended to correctly, should be seen as valuable, and should be realised.* So far, this is still quite vague. To understand it better, we need to understand what role *attention* is playing in this account, which the next section will discuss (§3), and also how James can claim that demands have both *belief*-like and *desire*-like qualities, which the following section will address (§4).

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[29] Note that James holds that, for human beings, other humans beings make up part of their environment. For instance, in his paper "What is Emotion", James explicitly notes that "[t]he most important part of my environment is my fellow man" (1884, EPs: 175).

§3 ATTENTION AND THE SELF

In this section, we'll focus more on the centrality of "attention" in James's account of reality, the self, and ethics. The first section explores the notion of attention and connects it with "consent" (§3.1); the second explores the role of habits in attention (§3.2); and the third connects attention, consent, and habit to James's notion of the self (§3.3).

§3.1 ATTENTION, REALITY AND CONSENT

We have seen that James consistently emphasises that the mind is not merely a passive receiver of information, but also an active selective force (§2). "[W]ithout selective interest", on James's view, "experience is an utter chaos" (1878, EPs: 19). We shape our experience by attending to certain elements of it, and ignoring others, and we do so, in part, on the basis of our interests.

In his *Principles*, James defines attention as "the taking possession of the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought" (1890, PP 1: 381). Personal experience is shaped by attention in this sense:

> Millions of items of outward order are present to my senses which never properly enter into my experience. Why? Because they have no *interest* for me. *My experience is what I agree to attend to* (1890, PP 1: 381).

There are three things to notice about this thought. First, that my experience is shaped by interest, which directs attention, and means that certain things show up as salient and certain things do not. Secondly, that attention implies choice, or "agreement" to attend to something. It is something at least in principle under our control (§6). Thirdly, and this will become more important when we look at the "fringe" and moral conversion experiences, there are elements of experience, here called the "outward order", which though not actively attended to are still present to my senses and/or thoughts, and *available* to enter into my experience.[30]

Experience without attention is a world "devoid of distinction of emphasis" (1879, EPs: 47). It is, in other words, a "blooming, buzzing confusion" (1890, PP 1: 462). Exactly what we *do* attend to is going to be conditioned in part by evolutionary concerns, in part by culture, and in part by personal experience and temperament (1879, EPs: 46-50), and, as we shall see, in part due to actual *choice*. But as a result of attention, we make for

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[30] See IV.2.2 for "the fringe", which will be applied in VI.2; and see VI.3.7 for moral conversion experiences.

ourselves a *lived world*, a practical experiential reality in which certain things *matter,* have *significance* and are *motivating* to us, and certain things do not:

> [T]he world *we* feel and live in will be that which our ancestors and we, by slowly cumulative strokes of choice, have extricated out of ["the primordial chaos of sensations"], like sculptors, by simply rejecting portions of the given stuff. […] My world is but one in a million alike embedded, alike real to those who may abstract them (PP 1: 277).[31]

Though through shared evolutionary and biological facts, shared practical interests, and perhaps similar cultural upbringing, human beings may inhabit lived worlds in which much is shared (1890, PP 1: 277-8). Nonetheless we should think of each individual as more or less inhabiting a different lived world, shaped by what they agree to attend to.[32]

Attention is linked with the notion of significance. Significance is defined by the feeling of urgency, and the occupying of our attention. If some element of our experience presents itself as significant, it will do so by occupying our attention with a kind of urgency. Equally we can only discover the significance of something by paying attention to it. Our lived worlds are made up of elements of experience which we attend to, and which we find significant.

Something having this significance, or having this place in our lived worlds, is what James means by it being real (for us). James links reality in this sense to "consent":

> *In its inner nature, belief or the sense of reality, is a sort of feeling more allied to the emotions than anything else* […] It resembles more than anything what in the psychology of volition we know as consent. Consent is recognized by all to be a manifestation of our active nature. It would naturally be described by such terms as "willingness" or the "turning of our

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[31] What we typically take to be common-sense objects and things are essentially the result of habits of attention, James suggests:

> But what are things? Nothing, as we shall abundantly see, but special groups of sensible qualities, which happen practically or aesthetically to interest us, to which we therefore give substantive names, and which we exalt to this exclusive status of independence and dignity. […] A man's empirical thought depends on the things he has experienced, but what these shall be is to a large extent determined by his habits of attention (1890, PP 1: 274-5).

"Things" in our perception are a result of our biological, cultural, and personal selective interest at work. And the same can be said for those features which we think are "essential" or "objectively real" about those things. We select from among the various features of this thing which will count as it's real essence on the basis, again, of our practical needs or other interests (1890, PP 1: 274-5).

[32] We should certainly think of different species as inhabiting very different "lived worlds" from our own: "How different must be the worlds in the consciousness of ant, cuttle-fish, or crab!" (1890, PP 1: 277).

> disposition". What characterises both consent and belief is the cessation
> of theoretic agitations, through the advent of an idea which is inwardly
> stable, and fills the mind solidly to the exclusion of contradictory ideas.
> When this is the case, motor effects are apt to follow (1890, PP 2: 913-4). [33]

Consent is a manifestation of our active nature, or our *will,* and involves some idea of object occupying our mind. We'll see a little later that the only effect that our volitional natures can actually perform, for James, is the direction of our attention (§6). And we can see this in James's connection of "willingness" with the "turning of our disposition", and his connection of "consent" with the "filling of the mind", or occupying our attention. Consent, then, is a feeling of agreement or *affirmation*, which accompanies our willing selection of some portion of our experience to attend to.

It is clear that our notions of significance, attention, reality and consent are all linked. Taking something to be real involves affirming or consenting to it, and this is dependent on how much attention can be directed towards it, which is in turn linked to how significant we find it to be:

> The mere fact of appearing as an object at all is not enough to constitute
> reality. That may be metaphysical reality, reality for God; but what we
> need is practical reality, reality for ourselves; and, to have that, an object
> must not only appear, but it must appear both *interesting* and *important*
> [...] *reality means simple relation to our emotional and active life.* This is the
> only sense which the word ever has in the mouths of practical men. *In this*
> *sense, whatever excites and stimulates our interest is [practically] real [for us]*
> (1890, PP 2: 924).

Attention determines what counts as real for any individual thinker. Dominant "habits of attention" determine or "practically elect" what will count as real for that person, from amongst various possibilities. In this way, our lived worlds, or our practical realities, are created and shaped by attention. "These are our *living* realities", James tells us, "and not only these, but all the other things which are intimately connected with these" (1890, PP 2: 926).

Consenting to some portion of experience, taking it to be *our reality*, involves attending to it and allowing it to fill our minds. We become aware of its significance, and are subsequently motivated to act appropriately. Consent in this sense is not always conscious, and is not always expressed, but is always an affirmation of the reality of some actual or possible element of experience:

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[33] See IV.4.1.

> The deepest question that is ever asked [*"Will you or won't you have it so?"* (1890, PP 2: 1182)] admits of no reply but the dumb turning of the will and tightening our heart-strings as we say, *"Yes, I will even have it so!"* (1890, PP 2: 1181).

The brute affirmation that some feature of our experience *shall* count as real (consent), within the context of a lived world of attention and interest, is something which I think should be central to our understanding of what a "demand" is.

§3.2 INSTINCTS AND HABITS

Many of the things which occupy our minds are not the result of the volitional direction of our attention, but the result of basic human instincts. Instincts are impulses to perform certain actions in the face of certain objects (1890, PP 2: 1006). As a result of these impulses to act, some things appear to us as obviously significant and valuable, in a way which we think requires no further explanation. Though the philosopher might be able to contemplate whether or not these types of objects are *really* valuable, to most human beings, operating under instincts, certain objects are indubitably valuable, and are pursued for their own sake.[34]

But these instincts, at least in humans, are not blind. Human beings have the capacity to reflect on their instincts, to draw from their memory and experience, and as a result alter the actions an instinct engenders. And we do so often in light of *ethical* considerations. Here's James's somewhat odd example of such an event:

> If a boy sees a fat hopping-toad, he probably has incontinently an impulse [...] to smash the creature with a stone, which impulse we may suppose

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[34] James uses the following example:

> Science may come and consider these ways, and find that most of them are useful. But it is not for the sake of their utility that they are followed, but because at the moment of following them we feel that that is the only appropriate and natural thing to do. Not one man in a billion, when taking his dinner, ever thinks of utility [...] And so, probably, does each animal feel about the particular things it tends to do in presence of particular objects. [...] To the broody hen the notion would probably seem monstrous that there should be a creature in the world to whom a nestful of eggs was not the utterly fascinating and precious and never-to-be-too-much-sat-upon object which it is to her (1890, PP 2: 1007-8).

We can connect this with the pragmatist notion of common-sense (I.5) and anti-scepticism (I.3); as well as Peirce's notion of sentimentalism (II.3).

> him blindly to obey. But something in the expression of the dying toad's clasped hands suggests the meanness of the act, or reminds him of sayings he has heard about the sufferings of animals being like his own; so that, when next he is tempted by a toad, an idea arises which, far from spurring him again to the torment, prompts kindly actions, and may even make him the toads champion against less reflecting boys (1890, PP 2: 1011).

Even our instincts, then, are habits which are susceptible to alteration on the basis of reflecting on our experience. James's example here – though we might question whether or not every small boy has an impulse to crush toads – shows us that instincts can be altered by attending to certain important features of the experience which follow from the impulse, and by reflecting on those experiences to alter the action which follows from the impulse next time around. We, in short, form *habits* to control the direction of our impulses. James here is close to Peirce on the matter of ethical sentiments, but allows for individual variation and reflection to legitimately alter these sentiments.[35]

The way we alter our instincts is primarily down to controlling the objects of our attention. Human beings, like most creatures, have a wide array of competing impulses. In any given situation, we have impulses moving us in several different directions. Like Hume, James claims that "reason" cannot actively inhibit these impulses. But what it *can* do is direct the attention away from certain objects, and towards others. "Reason may […] make an *inference which will excite the imagination so as to set loose* the impulse other way" (1890, PP 2: 1013). We can also set up habitual limitations of instinctive impulses. This is what we do, for instance, when we enter into a monogamous sexual relationship: we take one habitual object for our instinctive impulse, and so "restrict the range" of this instinct (1890, PP 2: 1015).

Take another, more ethical, example. James thinks that human beings have instincts both for aggression, and for sympathy. Often these impulses come into conflict, and draw us in different directions. James suspects that in most people the instinct for aggression is naturally stronger, and we are drawn to exercise it on people who offend us, either because they have some genuine malicious intent towards us, or else because we just don't like their "look, gait, or [there is] some circumstance in their lives which we dislike" (1890, PP 2: 1033). But through education we develop the habits to counter this instinct for aggression, and we learn to focus on and strengthen our instincts towards sympathy:

> Inhibited by sympathy, and by the reflection calling up impulses of an opposite kind, civilized men lose the habit of acting out of their pugnacious instincts in a perfectly natural way, and a passing feeling of

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[35] We saw in Chapter I.2-3 that pragmat(ic)ism involves the notion that beliefs are habits of actions which are subject to self-control.

anger, with its comparatively faint bodily expressions, may be the limit of their physical combativeness (1890, PP 2: 1033).

So, through reflection, and altering our attention, we can alter how our instincts habitually express themselves. Through efforts of imagination we can "call up" the sympathetic impulse to counter the aggressive. Or we can exorcise these aggressive impulses by creating games of competition, or by agreeing on other circumstances in which it is alright to exercise these instincts (1890, PP2: 1033). In these ways, we change the course of our impulses.[36]

In a perfect world, each of our several instincts (James lists at least twenty-six, and doesn't suggest the list is exhaustive) would find appropriate habitual outlets. In this way, we would come to taste "the essence of every side of human life" (1890, PP, 2: 1057). But, unfortunately, this relies on good education and the opportunity to practice and exercise each of our instincts appropriately. James thinks that, currently (or at least in 1890) the opportunity to develop as a full human being in this way is limited only to the privileged. Without sufficient moral education, our instincts can find "anomalous" expressions and "perverted" outlets (1890, PP 2: 1057).

§3.3 HABITS AND THE SELF

Like Peirce, James puts a great deal of importance on habits in human action. Due to a high degree of plasticity ("possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once" (1890, PP 1: 110)), living beings, and particularly human beings, can alter their habits. Habit in living beings is fundamentally about energy discharge. Discharging our energy in certain directions makes it easier for the same sequence of actions to occur again (1890, PP 1: 117). We've seen this already in the formation of habitual objects for our various instinctual impulses (§3.2). Habits can also decrease the amount of effort (1890, PP 1: 126) and conscious attention a complex activity requires (1890, PP 1: 119; 123).

James is quite clear that our habits structure our character and self, and that the decisions we make to structure our character are ethical decisions:

> The ethical energy *par excellence* has to go farther and choose which *interest* out of several, equally coercive, shall become supreme. The issue here is of the utmost pregnancy, for it decides a man's entire career. When

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[36] James talks about this in a less individualistic way in some of the last works of his life, where he explored setting up institutions and practices which shaped the exercise of a whole community's more pugnacious instincts (see VII.2.4).

> he debates, Shall I commit this crime? Choose that profession? Accept that
> office, or marry this fortune? – his choice really lies between one of several
> equally possible future Characters. What he shall *become* is fixed by the
> conduct of the moment (1890, PP 1: 276).

Each decision which we make between several different possibilities shapes our character. This is the selective aspect of consciousness at work. And we decide our habits by directing our attention to certain aspects of our experience, and not to others.

In the *Varieties*, James offers a similar view. There he links a person's identity or self with those aspects of experience which are of significance to them. He talks about this in terms of a field of sensory experience. There is a central focus of the experience, areas which are peripheral or marginal, and areas which are more or less outside of even the periphery, but which can enter the field if they become salient. The "margin" or the "periphery" can be linked with what James calls the "fringe".[37] In this field of experience, there are areas which are significant to us and are the "hot" areas, or the "focal" areas which contain the "excitement" (1902, VRE: 162). These hot areas form the centre of our experience and concern, the place where we find our source of "desire and volition", and which are the "centres of our dynamic energy" (1902, VRE: 162):

> Let us hereafter, in speaking of the hot place in a man's consciousness,
> the group of ideas to which he devotes himself and from which he works,
> call it *the habitual centre of his personal energy* (1902, VRE: 163).

Our habits of attention determine those portions of experience which we attend to and find significant. James explicitly links this to the self. This habitual centre of our energy and attention is what we identify as ourselves, as "mine", "this", "now", "here" and "me" (1902, VRE: 163).[38]

In short, then, our identity is determined by our habits of attention. The plasticity of our nature means that each action we perform makes that action easier to repeat in the future. This means that "[e]very smallest stroke of virtue or of vice leaves its never so little scar" (1890, PP 1: 131). We are responsible for shaping our characters not just in moments of crisis, but in the small decisions we make daily. Deciding what features of experience to attend to is to no small extent determining our own character, and, what is the same, the character of our own *lived world*. Later we'll see that the character we foster in ourselves is also vitally important when determining how we react in ethical

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[37] See IV.2.2.

[38] In the next chapter, we'll return to this idea, and see how moral conversion experiences work by shifting the centre of our energy and attention (VI.3.7).

dilemmas (VII.2.1), and can contribute to shaping the total character of the world (VII.2.2).[39]

We shouldn't under-estimate the role habits play in our ethical lives. Without the capacity to form habits, we would be mired in complexity and indecision.[40] But nor should we over-estimate their role. We'll see that for James *attention* and *effort* are the things which are central to morality, and not just because of their role in the formation of appropriate habits. Habit, when established, tends to reduce effort, and narrow conscious attention (1890, PP 1: 123; 126). We'll see that the true ethical life consists, for James, in *increasing* effort, and *broadening* attention. Effort is what allows us to move past habitual judgements and attend to the particularities of moral situations to which our habits can blind us. The "*highest* ethical life", James will tell us "consists at all times in the breaking of rules which have grown too narrow for the actual case" (1891, WB: 158).[41]

§4. BELIEVING AND WILLING

I've suggested that whatever "demands" are, that they have both belief-like and desire-like qualities. They should be considered "hypotheses", the kinds of things which are subject to evidence and aim to *discover* things about the world, as well as "challenges", the kinds of things which impel us to *create* changes in our environment.

This might seem like a rather serious confusion on James's part (or on mine). But in fact, James had reason for holding that there was no psychological distinction between desire-

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[39] See John Wild (1965; 1969: 301-313) for an account of Jamesian ethics which focuses solely on this personal responsibility.

[40] As James puts it in the *Principles*:

> There is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision, and for whom the lighting of every cigar, the drinking of every cup, the time of rising and going to bed every day, and the beginning of every bit of work, are subjects of express volitional deliberation. Full half the time of such a man goes to the deciding, or regretting, of matters which ought to be so ingrained in him as practically not to exist for his consciousness (1890, PP 1: 126).

Not only would such a person be incapable of action without intense deliberation, but they would also, in a strong sense, be without a sense of self.

[41] Though it is not quite this simple. James asserts at the end of his chapter on habit in *Principles* that attention and effort might themselves be in some senses susceptible to habit formation. Our capacity to assert effort and maintain attention on difficult or novel subjects are *themselves* faculties which can be lost through misuse, and strengthened through exercise. James tells his readers to do things every day that they would rather not, just to keep the faculty of effort alive, and enable us to handle truly challenging situations when they arrive (1890, PP 1: 130).

like mental states and belief-like mental states. What distinguishes these states is nothing psychological or phenomenological, but their relation with a wider body of facts and relations that James calls "nature":

> the difference between the objects of will and belief is entirely immaterial, as far as the relation of the mind to them goes. All that the mind does is in both cases the same; it looks at the object and consents to its existence, espouses it, says "it shall be my reality." It turns to it, in short, in the interested active emotional way. The rest is done by nature, which in some cases *makes* the object real which we think of in this manner, and in other cases does not […] *Will and Belief, in short, meaning a certain relation between objects and the Self, are two names for one and the same PSYCHOLOGICAL phenomenon* (1890, PP 2: 948).

Will (or desire) and belief are the same mental state taken psychologically and phenomenologically. And this mental state is one of *consent to the reality of the object attended to*. Consent to the reality of some portion of experience is neutral between "willing" and "believing". Subsequently, "nature" - or an outward order of fact - decides whether or not the thing consented to shall be real in a more objective sense or not.

Let's say I consent to the reality of a tree outside, in the full sense of thinking that there *should* be a tree outside, and that I *shall act* in accordance with this idea. Now I go outside, and find a tree. In this case "nature" has "made" the object I consented to real. I don't have to do anything else to realise my idea, as the tree is revealed to be a physical object in relation with other physical objects. My consenting attitude is categorised as belief-like. On the other-hand, if I go outside and find that there is *not* a tree there, then "nature" has not made the object of my consent real. Now, if I still wish to affirm the reality of the tree, my affirmation takes the form of *willing*, and the natural action which might follow would be me planting a tree in that location. "Wishing" is what occurs when we will, but we believe ourselves to be impotent to bring about the reality of the object willed (1890, PP 2: 1098; 1167n60).

It is important to note that James does not think that we need some extra volitional step to will some result. Willing is *solely* a matter of directing our attention. Once an element of our experience sufficiently occupies our minds, or becomes the centre of our attention, we consent to its reality, and as a result we become motivated to act in response to that reality. No additional volitional step is required. If we attend to some object, find it significant, consent to its reality, but do *not* act, then either we have *not* actually consented, perhaps because we do not find the object sufficiently significant, or some other object of concern is competing for our attention. Consent to the reality of the object

of our attention, whether willing or believing, is *the same thing* as having the disposition to act appropriately. We'll return to this idea later (§6).[42]

It might be helpful to say something additional about how "nature" makes some object real or not. The objects of our attention are portions of experience which we have drawn out of the various potential portions of experience which are available. These objects have actual or potential relations with other objects. If an object of our experience, no matter how significant we find it, has no actual or potential relation with the other practical realities we consent to, then we must reject it as unreal. Consenting to the reality of some object always takes place within a lived reality, and so must cohere with the other objects which make up that reality. Most importantly, for James, it must relate to, or at least not directly conflict with, our sensible and tangible reality, seeing as these are the most obviously real things (1890, PP 2: 930-4).[43] When an object of our contemplation is found to exist in actual relation with objects which we already take to be real, and specifically with physical objects, then "nature" has "made" the object real.[44]

This being said, James is also aware that the emotions and passions have a central role for our attribution of reality to some feature of experience. Though we experience the practical reality of tangible stuff every day, and only very rarely have moments in which we apprehend moral and religious "truths", there is a "depth in those brief moments which constrains us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences" (James, quoting Emerson, 1890, PP 2: 935). This feeling of "depth" is accounted for in two ways. First, such experiences at least appear to have a broader vision of relations. We see *more* and more of the connections between our experience when we have these moral

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[42] According to the *Principles,* we make the distinction between believing and willing on the basis of certain affective elements of our experience:

> When an idea *stings* us in a certain way, makes as it were a certain electric connection with our Self, we believe that it *is* a reality. When it stings us in another way, makes another connection with our Self, we say, *let it be* a reality. To the word "is" and the words "let it be" there correspond peculiar attitudes of consciousness which it is vain to seek to explain. The indicative and the imperative moods are as much ultimate categories of thinking as they are of grammar (1890, PP2: 1172-3).

As we shall see, James has less affective ways of making this distinction, though the affective element remains necessary and irreducible throughout his work.

[43] Of course, there are people who reject the reality of sensible things in favour for intellectual or religious realities. But James tends to think such people are pathological, or self-delusional. For most, "[s]ensible objects are […] either our realities or the tests of our realities. Conceived objects must show sensible effects or else be disbelieved" (1890, PP 2: 930). In effect, this is a form of the pragmatic maxim (I.1-3).

[44] This is essentially an expression of the position I defended in Chapter IV. See IV.4.3. See also VI.2.1, where this notion will be better explained in terms of real relations.

moments.[45] But we also attribute more reality to our momentary moral and religious experiences because they have more emotional impact. They present themselves as more significant, or more urgent:

> "Nothing which I can feel like *that* can be false". All our religious and supernatural beliefs are of this order (1890, PP 2: 936-937).

So far, this appears to be a very subjectivist position. James seemingly allows us to believe as real whatever we feel to be significant. However, as we'll see in the next chapter, James argues that such apparently subjective feelings can be genuinely cognitive of objective reality.

When we consent to the reality of some significant object, we must also consent to the reality of the things which are related to it:

> But what these adjectives ["real" and "outwardly existing"] stand for, we now know well. They stand for certain relations (immediate, or through intermediaries) to ourselves. Whatever concrete objects have hitherto stood in those relations have been for us "real", "outwardly existing". So that when we now abstractly admit a thing to be "real" […], it is as if we said "it belongs in the same world with those other objects" […] What I mean by my belief in it is simply my dim sense of *continuity* between the [unperceived object] and the present world [of my experience] […] The word "real" itself is, in short, a fringe (1890, PP 2: 947).

Our lived world, then, is not just a few significant objects of our experience, but a whole host of objects, and their actual and potential relations. We might consent to the reality of some object in an abstract sense because we have a "dim sense of *continuity*" between that object and the things which are significant to us.

Consent or affirmation of this kind is rarely a conscious decision. In fact, according to James we are naturally credulous creatures. It is our *"primitive impulse is to affirm immediately the reality of all that is conceived"* (1890, PP 2: 946). It is only when we find contradictory experiences, or when two things we want to affirm conflict, that we must consciously choose what to consent to and what to deny.[46] I think we can look at James's "faith-ladder" to see what James seems to take to be the natural course of credulity, or what he calls a "slope of good-will":

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[45] We'll return to this idea when we look at the "fringe" and at moral intuition. See VI.2.4; VI.3.6.
[46] We can also be trained to be more reflective and doubtful. Minds which have been "long schooled to doubt by the contradictions of experience" are less likely to display this primitive credulity (1890, PP2: 946; 946n30).

1. [Logical possibility] There is nothing absurd in a certain view of the world being true, nothing self contradictory;
2. [Real possibility] It might have been true under certain conditions;
3. [Actual possibility] It may be true, even now;
4. [Connection claim] It is fit to be true;
5. [Moral claim] It ought to be true;
6. [Imperative claim] It must be true;
7. [Affirmative claim] It shall be true, at any rate true for me
(1906-7; ML: 415; 1909, PU: 148; 1910, SPP: 113).[47]

In people who have been trained to doubt and reason, this passage from mere conception to full assertion might be considered step by step, in a measured passage (1890, PP 2: 946). And this is not necessarily a bad thing. Primitively, though, credulity slides us from logical possibility to affirmation pretty quickly, if no opposing affirmation stands in our way.

Entertaining an object of attention can range from merely accepting its logical possibility (1) to affirming its reality (7). Consenting to the reality of some object of attention, can vary in strength from merely accepting that the reality of that object does not directly conflict with things you take to be real (4), all the way up to the claim that you shall take it to be true, even if you need to act to bring it about (7). Notice that each of these claims are still neutral between "believing" and "willing", between finding some already existing object or relation of objects which your affirmative claim relates to (such that you *discover* it to be true), or not finding that already existing object or relation objects, and subsequently having to act to bring it about (such that you must act to *make* it true).

The faith-ladder example is helpful for us to see the different possible ways we can "consent" to some object of attention, and how these different versions of consent can shade into one another. However, it's worth noting that this model is meant to apply to our faiths and ideals – things that we think *should* be the case. We can, of course, believe something to be real, and affirm its reality in the full sense of consenting to it, without thinking that it *should* be real. We'll return to this idea later (§6).

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[47] It is worth remembering that the "faith-ladder" isn't an "intellectual chain of inferences, like the *sorites* of the logic-books". Rather,

> it is the sort of slope [of credulity] on which we all habitually live. In no complex matter can our conclusions be more than probable. We use our feelings, our good-will, in judging where the greater probability lies, and when our judgment is made, we practically turn our back on the lesser probabilities as if they were not there (1905, ERM: 125).

See VI.2.4.

So, if we do take "demands" to mean a particular case of consenting to the reality of some significant object of attention, in the context of a lived world, this explains the apparent confusion James makes between the belief-like and desire-like elements of these demands. In a very real sense, then, "demands" in James's ethics perform the same role as "experience" in James's metaphysics. Both are "neutral" in two ways. They are neutral in the sense that there is no common content shared by every demand or every pure experience (though each demand and each experience has some content). And they are "neutral" in the sense that they are prior to a distinction between "objective" and "subjective". A demand is ready to be an hypothesis subject to evidence, or a challenge to alter the world so that demand is met, but is neither in its first instance. In light of this neutrality, we should think of demands fundamentally as affirmations, rather than either "hypotheses" or "challenges".[48]

§5. THE SATISFACTION OF DEMAND IS GOOD

Our current picture of "demands", then, is this. A demand is an affirmation of the reality of some significant portion of our experience, in the full sense that we consent to its reality, think that it *should be* real, and are motivated to act in accordance with that reality. These significant elements of our experience which we affirm make up our lived worlds. Understood in this way, why is the satisfaction that demand considered to be "good", by James?

I suggested that looking at James's notion of the "faith-ladder" can give us an indication of how we should understand demands. The faith-ladder shows us how we can affirm or consent to the reality of some object with different degrees of force. "Consent" can

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[48] Contemporary work on intentionality assumes a difference between the "direction of fit" of beliefs and that of desires. Whereas desires aim to change the world, and a mismatch between desire and world results in us attempting to alter the world, beliefs aim to describe the world, and a mismatch between beliefs and the world results in us altering our beliefs (e.g. Anscombe, 1957: sec. 32). It is unclear exactly what James would say if confronted with this distinction. His statements in the *Principles* indicate that *all* intentional states begin with a primitive sense of *consent,* and are only subsequently (as a result of experience) categorised as belief-states or desire-states. This is perhaps consistent with the direction-of-fit distinction, but there are further complications. James is clear that even in matters of belief, we are not passive receivers of information, but active participants in the creation of truth (e.g. 1878, EPh: 21; VII.1.4). In this sense, desires *and* beliefs would have the same world-to-mind direction of fit. On the other hand, James of course holds that our hypotheses about the world should be responsive, and revisable, in the face of experience. But he seems to hold that, to a certain extent, the same is true of our more desire-like states. He certainly holds that our demands and ideals are like "hypotheses" in this sense, and is clear that no affirmation should be held to be infallible in the sense of un-revisable given relevant experience.

move from acknowledgement that some object fits with our understanding of the world (4), to an (often implicit) judgement that it *ought* to be the case (5), to the feeling of urgency or significance (6), and finally a willingness to act to bring the object about (7). These are all different ways of attending to some object, and its relations, such that we find it significant. Consenting to the reality of our object in the sense of (5) and (6) involves at least an implicit recognition that the object of our attention is valuable, and so should be realised.

The satisfaction of a demand should be thought of as the *realisation* or *actualisation* of it. Demanding *x* is an affirmation or consent to the reality of *x*. If we make *x* real then we have satisfied it. As the object is both judged to be worthy of being real (5), and of being significant (6) the realisation of the object demanded counts as a good, at least in the lived context in which this demand is made.[49]

In some cases, the reality I demand will already be real in a more objective sense ("nature" having made it real). In these cases, affirming this object as valuable will mean acting to respect it, preserve it, attend to it in the right ways, and whatever other actions are appropriate to such an object. In such examples, I believe in the good of some existent thing, rather than willing the existence of some potential good thing.

In other cases, the object or ideal which I affirm must be acted on if it is going to become realised. Obvious cases include desires and basic needs such as hunger. If I am hungry, then I must act, or others must act on my behalf, to bring about the satisfaction of my demand. I *should* eat (5), it is *important* to me to eat (6), I *shall* act to bring about my eating (7). The satisfaction of this demand counts as a good, at least in the context of the lived world in which the demand is being made. More abstract ideals are less easily satisfied. The demand that our society be a just one, for instance, is still a demand in the same sense, but its object is more abstract, its satisfaction difficult to achieve, and it is perhaps harder to see what would *count* as its satisfaction.

Of course, whether or not the satisfaction of some demand is actually good is subject to revision and criticism, even within the lived world in which it is made. Often the satisfaction of a demand is not able to exist in relation with other things which we affirm. The satisfaction of my desire to eat your sandwich might well be good (for me), but will conflict with other demands I have, such as the demand that we respect each other's property. Other times they conflict with a wider reality of relations. I think that it would be good for me to be able to fly, but I am unable to demand this because it conflicts with tangible features of my lived experience. This is what James means when he tells us that even in a moral solitude, the demander is subject to certain pressures to organise their demands in a unified system. This is one sense in which a demand is a "hypothesis". We

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[49] Of course, we can judge something to be real without thinking that it *ought* to be the case, as we shall see in the next section.

may find that a particular reality cannot be affirmed, given its relations with other objects of our experience, or that the satisfaction of that demand would conflict with other things we already affirm.[50]

In short, then, each of our demands is an affirmation that some significant object of our attention should be realised, and at least in the lived world context in which this demand is made, the satisfaction of it will (hypothetically) be a good (subject to certain constraints). Whether or not it should be recognised as good *in the long run*, depends on whether or not this object will be found valuable when attended to by others, and whether it fits with other values and beliefs about the world, as we shall see when we move onto objectivity in James's ethics.

§6. EFFORT AND ATTENTION

James has told us that our lived world is shaped by what we agree to attend to. But we've also seen that the will does not *add* some additional impulse to act. In fact, all the will does, according to James, is decide what to attend to. Subsequently, when the object of our attention has "filled our view" and we have consented to its reality, then it just follows that we act in accordance with that object. James's idea is that "consciousness is *in its very nature impulsive"*. As such, we "do not need to have a sensation or a thought and then have to *add* something dynamic to it to get a movement" (1890, PP 2: 1134). Perceiving something as significant and real just *is* to perceive it as something we should act appropriately towards. This section examines the role the will plays in the direction of our attention and the formation of our character. First, I will look at the role that effort and will plays in directing our attention (§6.1); and then I will examine James's thoughts on some of the virtues and vices of our willing natures (§6.2).

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[50] Suckiel (1982) interprets James's view as that the individual is the sole arbiter of what is good, in the sense that whatever is demanded by that individual cannot be immoral, and that the individual cannot be wrong about what is good (for them, at least). In her interpretation this leads James into several problems. He is unable to say, for instance, that a creature who refused to develop any of their potentialities would be worse, or lead a less valuable life, than a creature who did. Even before we move to the more objective features of James's ethics (see Chapter VI), we can deny Suckiel's interpretation. Though the individual might demand what they like, they are not the sole arbiter on whether or how these demands will be satisfied in the short or long term.

§6.1 EFFORT AND WILL

So, what the will *can* do is direct our attention. Here's James:

> attention with effort is all that any case of volition implies. The essential achievement of the will, in short, when it is most "voluntary" is to attend to a difficult object and hold it fast before the mind. The so-doing is the fiat; and it is a mere physiological incident that when the object is thus attended to, immediate motor consequences should ensue (1890, PP 2: 1166).

There are a couple of pieces of terminology to unpack here: "fiat", "effort", and "difficult object".

First, "fiat". By "fiat" James means that "element of consent" which "constitutes the essence of the voluntariness of the act" (1890, PP2: 1111; see 1880, EPs: 90). James's statement here amounts to what we've already seen: attending to an object in a certain way *counts* as consent. The will does not add some extra element of consent on top of this attention, but the will can determine which objects we will attend to, and so subsequently consent to.

Next, "difficult object". Some objects are easy for us to attend to, or coerce our attention with no effort on our behalf. Objects which we are passionate about, objects which we have built up habits towards, objects which give us pleasure, and objects which are near to us in space and time, are easier to attend to. In contrast, "all far-off considerations, all highly abstract conceptions, unaccustomed reasons, and motives foreign to the instinctive history of the race, have little or no impulsive power." (1890, PP 2: 1143). These objects are difficult in the sense that they do not coerce our attention, we are not naturally interested, excited, or impassioned by them. It takes work to maintain our attention on these objects.

Finally, "effort". James tells us that difficult objects "prevail [in our attention], when they ever do prevail, *with effort*" (1890, PP 2: 1143). He means that if difficult objects are to achieve our consent, and be counted as real and acted upon, they can only become so with effort expended on our part to direct our attention, rather than just allowing our attention to be coerced only by whatever excites our passions. In this sense, effort characterises voluntary attention, times in which we attend not to the most "potent stimuli", but instead we attend to features of our experience which are "naturally unimpressive" (1890, PP 1: 397). James also connects "effort" with the overcoming of habitual modes of interpretation or action.[51]

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[51] See VI.3.5.

The most obvious case where "effort" plays a role in directing attention, consent, and action, are will-to-believe cases. Will-to-believe cases (and we'll return to these later – see VII.1.4) are defined by two or more equally live or interesting, but mutually exclusive, options being available for belief. As we've seen, belief is a matter of consent, and consent is a matter of attention. In will-to-believe cases, we choose, through effort, to attend to one equally plausible and coercive option over the other, and as a result come to believe it, and be motivated by it. Thus, we in effect choose what to believe, what will count as real in our own lived world, and subsequently (whether immediately, over time, over a whole life-time, or over the course of generations) this belief will be confirmed or denied by the experience of the race as a whole.

As James has indicated, we can have genuine experiences of what appear to be moral truths, in which a moral ideal or some moral duty becomes salient, exciting, interesting, or otherwise coercive over our attention.[52] In such cases, it does not take effort to do the right thing. Often, however, moral concerns are difficult objects. They are abstract, removed from direct experience, removed from our immediate practical concerns, often go against immediate pleasures, or reject conventional or habitual interpretations and actions. In such cases, moral action requires *effort*. On the understanding that it usually more difficult to attend to and be motivated by the morally *right* thing, James offers the following definition of moral action in the *Principles*:

> [I]f a brief definition of ideal or moral action were required, none could
> be given which would better fit the appearances than this: *It is action in*
> *the line of the greatest resistance* (1890, PP 2: 1155).

We might suspect that James is somewhat exaggerating his position here. As he himself has noted, often particular experiences allow us to see moral ideals in a coercive and exciting light. Also, it seems obvious that not *every* difficult object is ethically relevant. My attention will be pretty resistant to counting all the pebbles on Brighton beach, but this does not make it a moral action if I manage to attend to it for long enough. Finally, it seems that part of the amelioration of our moral landscape will come from making it *easier*, through education, the formation of habits, and various institutions, for people to do the morally right thing.[53]

A little later, James offers a more helpful definition of moral action:

> To sustain a representation [through effortful attention], to think, is, in
> short, the only moral act, for the impulsive and the obstructed, for the
> sane and the lunatics alike (1890, PP 2: 1170).

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[52] See VI.2.4 3.6-7.
[53] See VII.2.4

Seeing as the direction of attention with effort is the only voluntary act we can perform, it follows that the only moral act we can perform is voluntary in precisely this sense, and involves controlling what we attend to, what we consent to, and what we find motivating.

§6.2 STRENGTH OF CHARACTER AND WEAKNESS OF WILL

As the previous section showed, the capacity that we have to motivate effort in directing our attention is a primary ethical virtue. In fact, in the *Principles*, James tells us that:

> [T]he faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgement, character, and will (1890, PP 1: 401).

As we move on to James's account of inter-personal obligation, and the formation of an objective account of morality, we'll see that he appeals to more virtues, including sensitivity, perception, good judgement, (doxastic) courage, and fallibility.[54] Here, I'd like to just suggest two things to take from the importance of effort. The first is James's account of weakness of the will. The second is his notion of the "strenuous mood", which will become more important as we go ahead.

According to James, the "moral tragedy" of human life is that it is more difficult to attend to morally important elements of our experience than it is to attend to the pleasurable, the habitual, the conventional, and the immediate. We do not find the appropriate objects sufficiently stimulating, able to coerce our attention, stimulate our consent, and motivate our action:

> [t]he moral tragedy of human life comes almost wholly from the fact that the link is ruptured which normally should hold between vision of the truth and action, and that this pungent sense of effective reality will not attach to certain ideas (1890, PP 2: 1153).

Weakness of will, for James, essentially means the incapacity to redirect our attention to difficult but ethically important elements of our experience.

Take, for instance, James's example of the alcoholic struggling to remain sober:

> [t]ake, for example, an inebriate struggling with temptation. The glass is before him, and the act of drinking has an infinity of aspects and may be defined in as many ways. If he selected the aspect of its helping him to

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[54] See VI.3.9

write an article, of its being only lager-beer, of its being the fourth of July, of his needing it as medicine, of his never having formally signed the pledge, of this particular drink "not counting," or else of its giving him the strength to make a much more powerful resolution for the future than any of his previous ones, or whatever other sophistries his appetite may instigate, he does but accentuate some character really contained in the act, but needing this emphasizing pressure of his attention to be erected into its essence. But if, out of all the teeming suggestions with which the liquor before him inspires his brain, respectively saying, "It is a case of this good, of that interest, of yonder end," his mind pounces on one which repeats, "It is essentially a case of drunkenness!" and never lets that go, his stroke of classification becomes his deed of virtue. The power of choosing the right name for the case is the true moral energy involved, and all who posit moral ends must agree in the supreme utility of, at least, this kind of selective attention (1878, EPs: 58).

James returns to this case in the *Principles*, and explicitly connects it with effort:

But if he once gets able to pick out that way of conceiving, from all the other possible ways of conceiving the various opportunities which occur, if through thick and thin he holds to it that this is being a drunkard and is nothing else, he is not likely to remain one long. The effort by which he succeeds in keeping the right *name* unwaveringly present to his mind proves to be his saving moral act (1890, PP 2: 1170).

The idea here is that there are any number of ways the person struggling with temptation can interpret his current experience, by directing his attention to certain aspects of it. Many of those aspects, and ways of attending, will encourage him to take a drink. And indeed, due to his already formed habit, the aversion we all have to self-criticism, and the immediate pleasure such an action would bring, focusing on one of these aspects would be the easiest action for him. However, attending to the elements of the experience which would label him a drunk, and attending to this aspect of the experience *only*, in the face of competing and more compelling aspects which would enable him to drink, takes effort, and is a moral act.

As we've seen, each decision like this one makes it more likely a similar decision will be made in the future (§3.2-3). In this way, the alcoholic in this case is not just deciding between two different possible *acts* through the direction of attention. They are deciding between two different possible *characters* (1890, PP 1: 276). Each decision between several different possibilities of action shapes our future habits and so our character.

Many people in this situation, James thinks, have moral knowledge, have ideal motivations, have some interests which direct their attention in the right direction, and have the appropriate sentiments to act morally. But nonetheless, if they lack the capacity to motivate *effort*, to direct their attention, and to focus on one interest over others in

such a way as to *consent* to the right reality and be motivated by the right objects, they won't be able to make the right decisions. Their moral feelings remain "grumbling and rumbling" in the background, and they will never move "from the subjunctive into the imperative mood" (1890, PP 2: 1154).[55] Appealing to our "faith-ladder" model, we can say such people never move from the recognition that it they *ought* to do *x* (5), to being motivated by the significance of *x* (6), and consenting to the reality of *x* in a full sense (7). They remain in a state of indecision, with multiple competing and contradictory interests pulling them in different directions, or else they let their attention be coerced by some pleasant but ethically problematic or ethically neutral aspect of experience.

The opposite person, the person who does "move from the subjunctive to the imperative mood*"*, is the person who adopts what James calls the "heroic" or (more commonly), the "strenuous mood".

According to James, we can distinguish between two types of mood, the "easy-going mood" and the "strenuous mood". Here's how James presents it in "The Moral Philosopher":

> When in the easy-going mood the shrinking from present ill is our ruling consideration. The strenuous mood, on the contrary, makes us quite indifferent to present ill, if only the greater ideal be attained (1891, WB: 159-160).

We'll look at the strenuous mood in more detail later.[56] Here it is worth just pointing out that the strenuous mood is characterised by effort of attention. This difference in mood is the "deepest difference" in the moral life of two different people (1891, WB: 159). It is the difference between having demands, ideals, and principles which lead only to "pinings and regrets", and having those which bring about actual effects, and are genuinely "creative" (1902, VRE: 215). The strenuous mood allows us to focus on those difficult elements of experience, at the expense of our immediate pleasures and more trivial concerns.

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[55] As James puts it:

> The more ideal motives exist alongside of them in profusion, but they never get switched on, and the man's conduct is no more influenced by them than an express train is influenced by a wayfarer standing by the roadside and calling to be taken aboard. They are an inert accompaniment to the end of time; and the consciousness of inward hollowness that accrues from habitually seeing the better only to do the worse, is one of the saddest feelings one can bear with him through this vale of tears (1890, PP 2: 1154).

See VII.3.8.

[56] See VI.3.8

The strenuous mood, for instance, might allow us to move past instinctive, habitual or passional responses and to focus on the rationally correct course of action. James is, of course, insistent that passions often assist with our moral lives, and that a full moral life is impossible without the passions. Nonetheless, often some strong emotion keeps us from attending to the right elements of our experience. Perhaps attending to some slight, or some perceived offence, keeps us in a foul mood, and unable to respond to other people in the right way. Due to some "self-preserving instinct" which such passions have, they tend to drown out any more reasonable demand on our attention. They present the reasonable option as being "cold" or "hostile to the movement of life" (1890, PP 2: 1168). The strong-willed person, then, is the one who:

> hears the still small voice [of reason] unflinchingly, and who, when the death-bringing consideration comes, looks at its face, consents to its presence, clings to it, affirms it, and holds it fast, in spite of the host of exciting mental images which rise in revolt against it and would expel it from the mind. Sustained in this way by a resolute effort of attention, the difficult object ere long begins to call up its own congerers and associates and ends by changing the disposition of the man's consciousness altogether. And with his consciousness, his action changes, for the new object, once stably in possession of the field of his thoughts, infallibly produces its own motor effects. The difficulty lies in the gaining possession of that field (1890, PP 2: 1168)

In this case, the person attends, with effort, to the more difficult elements of experience (here indicated by the voice of reason), and away from the easier elements they are directed to by the passions. After a period of sustained attention, the difficult object begins to sustain itself, connecting with other ideas, experiences, and considerations until our whole field of consciousness is attending to it, finding it significant, and consenting to its reality.

In short, it is through attending to some elements of our experience and not to others that we consent to the reality of those elements. We create, with this consent, the character of the reality we inhabit, our lived worlds, and, which is the same, our characters. Effort, and the strenuous mood, allows us to shape our worlds and characters in the right direction.

There is a second, connected sense in which James uses the word effort. As we've already seen, we must sometimes accept the reality of negative features of experience (§4). Amelioration requires accepting as real things which we wish weren't. It takes effort to accept these things, rather than merely avoiding attending to them. It is this consideration which leads James to the following, Nietzschean sounding statement:

> When a dreadful object is presented, or when life as a whole turns up its dark abysses to our view, then the worthless ones among us lose their

hold on the situation altogether, and either escape from its difficulties by averting their attention, or if they cannot do that, collapse into yielding masses of plaintiveness and fear. The effort required for facing and consenting to such objects is beyond their power to make. But the heroic mind does differently. To it, too, the objects are sinister and dreadful, unwelcome, incompatible with wished-for things. But it can face them if necessary, without for that losing its hold upon the rest of life. The world thus finds in the heroic man its worthy match and mate; and the effort which he is able to put forth to hold himself erect and keep his heart unshaken is the direct measure of his worth and function in the game of human life. He can *stand* this Universe. He can meet it and keep up his faith in it in presence of those same features which lay his weaker brethren low. He can still find a zest in it, not by "ostrich-like forgetfulness," but by pure inward willingness to take the world with those deterrent objects there. And hereby he becomes one of the masters and the lords of life. He must be counted with henceforth; he forms a part of human destiny (1890, PP 2: 1181).

Looking past the rather elitist terminology of the "worthy" and the "worthless", James is telling us that to change the world we inhabit, we must attend to features of it which are dissatisfied with, despite the fact that these elements are not easy objects to focus on. In James's terminology, this means "consenting" and "affirming" those realities, though this does not mean that we accept them as good. In fact, those elements of reality are *opposed* to our goods. Attending to such difficult objects requires effort, but is necessary if we are going to alter them. Attending to the negative aspects of the world, whilst still affirming our own values, is what is required to (possibly) change the world. And in this sense, such people form "part of human destiny".[57]

It is easy to take passages like this, and others, to indicate James thinks only a select few of us can adopt this "heroic" stance, and so form a "part of human destiny" in large matters of state or religion. But it is certainly the case that *each* of us create the reality we all inhabit by consent:

> [N]ot only our morality but our religion, so far as the latter is deliberate, depend on the effort which we can make. *"Will you or won't you have it so?"* is the most probing question we are ever asked; we are asked it every hour of the day, and about the largest as well as the smallest, the most theoretical as well as the most practical, things. We answer by *consents or non-consents* and not by words. What wonder that these dumb responses

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[57] In *Varieties*, James contrasts two versions of living the moral or religious life. There are those who can "live on smiles and the word 'yes' forever". But for most people such a life is seen as "slack and insipid […] mawkish and intolerable". Most people, according to James, seek some "austerity and wintery negativity, some roughness, danger, stringency, and effort, some 'no! no!' mixed in, to produce the sense of an existence with character and texture and power" (1902, VRE: 240). We'll return to this idea in VII.1.

> should seem our deepest organs of communication with the nature of
> things! What wonder if the effort demanded by them be the measure of
> our worth as men! What wonder if the amount which we accord of it be
> the one strictly underived and original contribution which we make to
> the world! (1890, PP 2: 1182).

We all help shape our common reality, then, by attending to the world, by consenting or not consenting to features of it, and by affirming our values and ideals in the face of its negative aspects or being not able to make this effort. Combating or ignoring racist abuse on public transport, protesting or not protesting some governmental policy, following or not following conventional etiquette, in each of these every day events we are consenting to or not consenting to some reality. Though we may be able to avoid attending to these elements of our lives, by doing so we are not avoiding the question. In some issues, James reminds us, the "universe will have no neutrals" (1882, WB: 89).[58]

§7. DEMANDS AND OBLIGATIONS

Now we understand better what James might mean by "a demand", and why the satisfaction of a demand counts as a (hypothetical) good (in some context), we can get clearer on why each demand supposedly carries with it an obligation to be met. This final section examines James's claim that each demand has a corresponding obligation (§7.1); explores how James could distinguish between imperative and non-imperative demands (§7.2); and finally examines James's claim that we each have some obligation to "realise" each other (§7.3).

§7.1 EVERY DEMAND HAS AN OBLIGATION

We have seen that all demands must be made by some living creature (1891, WB: 147). Demands are relational and indexical. They are made by some living creature, and are directed at some significant element of their experience which is judged worthy of being realised. We cannot reduce these moral relations to non-personal physical facts about

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[58] The final chapter (VII) is concerned with the role that individuals play in the creation of their moral environment through such effort, and whether or not this conflicts with James's assertion of ethical realism.

the world (1891, WB: 145). And we cannot explain them by an appeal to a non-personal abstract moral order (1891, WB: 147). In order to be real, demands and goods must bottom out in the experience of some actual organism.[59]

Like demands, obligations cannot be reduced to anything non-personal:

> Like the positive attributes good and bad, the comparative ones better and worse must be *realized* in order to be real. If one ideal judgment be objectively better than another, that betterness must be made flesh by being lodged concretely in someone's actual perception. […] Its *esse* is *percipi*, like the *esse* of the ideals themselves between which it obtains. The philosopher, therefore, who seeks to know which ideal ought to have supreme weight and which one ought to be subordinated, must trace the *ought* itself to the *de facto* constitution of some existing consciousness (1891, WB: 147).

James's claim here is that if it is the philosopher's task to discover some objective order to our various competing demands, so that they can judge that one demand ought to be realised above the others, then this "betterness" relation cannot exist outside of the actual experiences of moral agents.

We are also not permitted to think that the "universe as a whole" makes some demand of us, or places us under some obligation. We have a tendency to think, when we have some moral disagreement, that there is "an abstract moral order in which the objective truth resides", such that if one person's demand corresponds with this order then it is properly obligatory (1891, WB: 148). James calls this the "superstitious view". It is this view that he argues against in "The Moral Philosopher":

> I know well how hard it is for those who are accustomed to what I have called the superstitious view, to realize that every *de facto* claim creates in so far forth an obligation. We inveterately think that something which we call the "validity" of the claim is what gives to it its obligatory character, and that this validity is something outside of the claim's mere existence as a matter of fact. It rains down upon the claim, we think, from some sublime dimension of being, which the moral law inhabits (1891, WB: 148).

Exactly what James thinks is wrong with the "superstitious view" is somewhat unclear. He tells us that he finds it hard to imagine how some "inorganic abstract character of imperativeness" could actually exist (1891, WB: 148). This might be thought to be some sort of "metaphysical queerness" argument against moral realism. But this doesn't seem to be doing much work and, after all, James is no stranger to odd sounding metaphysical

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[59] We'll see that the one of the major additions we can make to James's ethics by interpreting it through his radical empiricism is the rejection of this apparent nominalism. Radical empiricism can refer to *potential* as well as *actual* experiences and relations.

claims. And, as we'll see later, James is quite certain that we need some "objective reference" for our moral ideals (VI.1.3). Another reason for taking this position is James's empiricism, and his over-arching project of providing an account of ethics without appealing to anything non-experiential. Appealing to an *a priori* moral order, rather than to the feelings of actual moral agents, and their interactions and experiences, would be an instance of the trans-experiential features of philosophy James is committed to rejecting (1891, WB: 147). James has also rejected the possibility of discovering general principles which govern all our moral interactions (§1.2). However, the main reason James rejects the "superstitious view" is that it appears to be *pragmatically useless.*

James connects "obligation" very strongly with "capacity to motivate us". This is a basic pragmatist inference. What "being under an obligation" means, pragmatically, is that we should be motivated to act in accordance with that obligation. James's primary problem with the superstitious view, then, is that some "ideal order" or some "moral law" outside of the demands held by actually existing people, has no power to motivate us:

> the only force of appeal to *us*, which either a living God or an abstract ideal order can wield, is found in the "everlasting ruby vaults" of our own human hearts, as they happen to beat responsive and not irresponsive to the claim. So far as they do feel it when made by a living consciousness, it is life answering to life. A claim thus livingly acknowledged is acknowledged with a solidity and fulness which no thought of an "ideal" backing can render more complete; while if, on the other hand, the heart's response is withheld, the stubborn phenomenon is there of an impotence in the claims which the universe embodies, which no talk about an eternal nature of things can gloze over or dispel. An ineffective *à priori* order is as impotent a thing as an ineffective God; and in the eye of philosophy, it is as hard a thing to explain (1891, WB: 149-150).

James's argument is something like this. Every obligation to act comes from a (implicit or explicit) demand from some living source. Being motivated by some obligation involves us being *responsive* to the demand made by that being. Being responsive is a matter of "life answering to life", in that it involves one living creature being motivated by the demands of another. A purely abstract order will not be able to *add* any motivation to this concrete response to the demands of another living being. And if such a response is absent, an abstract order will have no additional *force* to motivate us. Either way, then, the idea of some abstract order above and beyond the lived experience of moral agents is pragmatically useless when talking of moral obligation.

So, contrary to the view in which the obligatoriness or validity of demands resides in an external standard, James wants a standard which is internal to the actual experiences and demands of moral agents. We cannot appeal to some "inorganic" and "abstract" character of "imperativeness" but instead must restrict ourselves only to the

"imperativeness which is in the concrete claim itself" (1891, WB: 148-9). It is in this spirit that we should take James's statement that:

> Take any demand, however slight, which any creature, however weak, may make. Ought it not, for its own sole sake, to be satisfied? If not, prove why not. The only possible kind of proof you could adduce would be the exhibition of another creature who should make a demand that ran the other way. The only possible reason there can be why any phenomena ought to exist is that such a phenomenon actually is desired. Any desire is imperative to the extent of its amount: it *makes* itself valid by the fact that it exists at all. Some desires, truly enough, are small desires; they are put forward by insignificant persons, and we customarily make light of the obligations which they bring. But the fact that such personal demands as these impose small obligations does not keep the largest obligations from being personal demands (1891, WB: 149).[60]

Every demand is personal. Every demand comes with some good attached. And, *prima facie*, each demand comes with an obligation to be actualised. The only reasons we have to *not* meet some obligation is some *other* demand which conflicts with it. We tend to think that some demands are more valid, and so should be met before others. But this validity cannot be attributed to some non-personal order of things, but must be defended on other grounds.

The "validity" of any claim, and its "imperativeness" is something we'll look at closely in the next chapter, when we turn to James's attempt to make his ethical picture more objective. But the important thing to note here is that validity and imperativeness *cannot* be found in some impersonal standard, but must be sought within the moral experience of moral agents.

We can see from what has already been said that obligation, on James's account, is a fundamentally inter-personal phenomenon. In a moral solitude (in which there is only one demander) or in a moral multi-verse (in which there are several demanders who are indifferent to each other) obligations do not occur.[61] But in a world in which just two "loving souls" existed, who cared about each other, then there would be a full "moral life, whose active energy would have no limit but the intensity of interest in each other with which the hero and heroine might be endowed" (1891, WB: 150).

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[60] Notice that James carelessly switches between "desire" and "demand" here, despite the fact he is quite clear that "demands" do not have common content, whereas "desire" is usually linked to hedonic concerns. It is instances like this that encourage interpreters to see James as a desire-utilitarian. For my reading, I assume that "desires" are a subset of "demands", rather than all demands being desires.

[61] Unless we think that one self can make obligatory demands on a future self (1891, WB: 159).

Seeing as James does not say much (explicitly) about the inter-personal nature of obligation on his account, it is worth briefly comparing it with modern work on "second-personal" ethics. In a forthcoming paper, Robert Stern (2018) examines the literature on second-personal ethics, and contrasts two different ways in which demands given to us from another moral agent can be seen as morally obligatory.[62] A demand can be seen as a *command*, or a demand can be seen as an *appeal*. Darwall (2006; 2013a; 2013b) focuses on the *command* interpretation, in analogy with a divine command type account. On this view, we have an obligation to follow a demand given to us by some relevant authority, and *each* moral agent counts as a relevant authority. As a result, we have an obligation to follow a demand simply by virtue of it being demanded. Stern contrasts this to *responsibility* accounts of demand, represented by Knud Løgstrup (1956/1997). On Løgstrup's account, moral obligation arises not from the fact that we were commanded by some authority, but from the fact that we have some power over the demander, that the demander has needs to which we can be responsive, and that (by virtue of the power we have over them), we have some responsibility for their well-being.

James does not say enough in "The Moral Philosopher" to indicate which of these accounts he might subscribe to, but there are some indications which can allow us to speculate on his position. Firstly, on the command view of demands the bindingness of an obligation emerges out of what a demand *is*. The fact that it is demanded by a relevant authority makes it obligatory. James, on the other hand, separates the creation of an obligation from its bindingness. He tells us that every demand carries an obligation to be met, but (as we'll see later) that the bindingness, or what James calls the *imperativeness*, of obligations come either from the *felt urgency* of them (§7.2), or from their place within a communal moral inquiry.

Similarly, James separates the authority of a demand from the force that it has to move us. The very highest authority might demand something of us, but the only "force of appeal to *us*", the capacity to actually *motivate* us, comes only from our responsiveness or lack of responsiveness to their (implicit or explicit) demand. In fact, James associates an appeal to authority with the superstitious view that he is rejecting. Rather than attributing authority to every demander, James is at pains to attribute it to *none*: "[t]here is [...] no visible thinker invested with authority" (1891, WB: 151). Rather than a result of perceiving authority, James presents obligation as a matter of "life answering to life" (1891, WB: 149). This idea of "life answering to life" certainly seems to suggest that James would subscribe more to the "responsibility" view of demands, rather than the "command" view.[63]

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[62] See also Stern (2014a; 2014b).

[63] We'll look closer at the exact role God plays in James's ethics later (VI.4), but here it will be useful to have a look at God's position in "The Moral Philosopher" as a way of distinguishing between *command* and *responsibility* interpretations of "demand". We've already seen that if there

Can we now say a little more about why *every* demand in principle carries with it an obligation to be met? This view appears to contradict a common and reasonable intuition that there are some demands which have no legitimacy, and which should never be seen as obligatory.[64] There are several reasons that James might defend this position. The first is a merely formal one. Each demand counts as an affirmation of some good, or some value, within the context of a lived world. And if something is a good, we feel a requirement to bring it about. As interested, partial beings, we have our own demands and goods which we affirm. But as ethical philosophers, we want to be as disinterested and impartial as possible, so we have to admit that *each* demand is a good (for someone), and so has an obligation to be met.

There is also an aesthetic reason. James often appeals to "richness" as a criterion for adjudicating between interests, demands, and goods. A world in which a more diverse array of values were actualised would be a richer and a more interesting world. In "The Moral Philosopher", James tells us that the ethical philosopher, as impartial, should vote for the richest possible world (1891, WB: 158).[65]

We also have *epistemic* obligations. As we've seen, demands are not just *desires* or *challenges*, but are also *hypotheses*. If we are genuinely interested in attaining true knowledge in the field of ethics (and James thinks we all are, to some extent, as we'll see in VI.3.1), we cannot afford to reject any plausible hypotheses. We thus have an epistemic obligation to try as many reasonable hypotheses into what is valuable as possible. Only in this way will we find what is *really* good, or good in the long run.

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is a God, who demands certain things, then it is a *personal* demand, and not an impersonal one. And we've seen that the only force to move us will be our passional response or lack of response to His personal demand. However, James does tell us, that "[i]f there be such a consciousness, then its demands carry the most of obligation simply because they are the greatest in amount" (1891, WB: 149). James isn't clear what he means by this, but it seems that he means *either* that divine demands would be the most imperative of obligations because they are the most *urgent*, or that God's demands include everyone else's, and so they are the most *inclusive*. Either way, James is not suggesting that we meet them because they are commanded by an authority. Or, if God *is* an authority, then he is an *epistemic* authority (he has the greatest view of the moral landscape), and does not have authority merely as *commander*. Later in the same essay, James tells us that God's presence allows us to feel the appeal of the more imperative ideals (1891, WB: 160). Again, he does not *command* us to follow them, but he allows us to perceive their *appeal.*

[64] Cf. Slater (2009: 93); Roth (1969: 66-71); Talisse and Aikin (2011: 7). See VI.2.2.

[65] For instance, James holds that "richness" is, along with unity and simplify, one of the common human preferences we use to select theories:

> *ceteris paribus*, no system which should not be rich, simple, and harmonious would have a chance of being chosen for belief if rich, simple and harmonious systems were there (1890, PP 1: 943).

See 1878, EPh: 13.

There is one further reason which might lead James to suggest that every demand comes with an obligation to be realised. Our lived worlds are composed of ideals and other significant elements of experience. A demand is an affirmation of an ideal or significant element of experience, and an assertion that it deserves to be realised in a wider environment. As human beings to a large extent make up the environment of other human beings, their attention and responsiveness to other's demands will be a large determinant in whether a demand is realised or not. Often the realisation of demand requires action, or at least recognition, by other people. So, another's responsiveness or irresponsiveness to some demand determines whether it will be realised. If I am irresponsive to a demand of yours, then I am (often) not merely preventing you from having some object which you find enjoyable, but I am preventing an ideal which shapes your reality and self from being recognised and realised. The obligation to meet every demand, then, could stem from the demand's role in the constitution of the self and the lived world of the demander.

On a longer time-frame, customarily ignoring the demands of one person or class of people produces a specific kind of injustice. By being customarily irresponsive to a class of demand or demander, we prevent those people from fully realising themselves, and connecting their values with a wider body of facts and relations. This customarily insensitivity to demands which are not our own is what James calls "moral blindness".[66] The result of this blindness is that we prevent a class of people from realising their values, contributing to a shared moral universe, and from contributing to the shared store of values which we pass to the next generation. My obligation to actualise as many goods as possible, then, is an obligation not just to specific other people, but also to the ongoing creation of the "total [moral] character of the universe" (1906, P: 26-7; 1906-7, ML: 416; see VII.2).

Of course, I cannot attend to every aspect of experience. But there are more or less strong ways of "consenting" to or "affirming" some value. If we return to our notion of the "faith-ladder" we can see this. I need not consent to your ideal in the full sense of finding it significant for me, and being motivated by it. But I might consent enough to think that it *might* be true, that it is *fit* to be true, or even that it *ought* to be true. This means that I will allow your affirmed reality to motivate me insofar as I treat it as a real possibility. I will at least be motivated not to stand in your way when you are attempting to realise your value. If I recognise it as *fit* to be true, I will see the connections between my values and your own. Perhaps, if I think it *ought* to be true, I might assist the realisation of your value, even if I do not fully feel the significance of that ideal. Of course, when attending to the aspect of experience which your demand has drawn my attention to, I may well

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[66] See VI.3.4

come to see the significance of the ideal, affirm it fully, and subsequently be motivated by it in the strongest sense.

The *motivating* force behind perceiving and acting under some obligation is always a matter of how well we attend to some element of experience which appears significant in a lived world which is not our own. This is the sense in which James means that obligation is always a matter of "life answering to life". My response to your demand comes essentially from my sympathetic attention to elements of your lived world. Being motivated by an obligation involves us creatively, imaginatively, and sympathetically engaging with another person, and seeing their object of attention as significant and motivating. It is in my power to help or to hinder the realisation of your demands, which in turn means it is within my power to shape your lived world, and shape your capacity to contribute to our shared world. We can connect this to James's claim, elsewhere, that our sole obligation is to "realise" each other, which we'll turn to (§7.3), after we examine the notion of *imperativeness*.

§7.2 Imperative Demands

Even in a moral solitude, certain demands will strike us as more important, more urgent, or more significant than other demands. This is the sense in which, even when no other persons or organisms are involved, *some* notion of obligation is still operative in a moral solitude, in the sense that there is pressure for the solitary demander to order their lives in such a way that these urgent demands get met:

> Some of these [ideals] will no doubt be more pungent and appealing than
> the rest, their goodness will have a profounder, more penetrating taste;
> they will return to haunt him with more obstinate regrets if violated. So
> the thinker will have to order his life with them as its chief determinants,
> or else remain inwardly discordant and unhappy (1891, WB: 146).

Even within the demands of *one* creature, then, there are those which are more important than others, and deserve to be met over others. And the way we measure this importance is, again, experiential.

In trying to explain the difference between "imperative" demands and non-imperative demands, James appeals to the felt urgency of certain demands, and the resistance certain demands have to being ignored:

> [S]ome of the demands might be urgent and tyrannical, while others were
> gentle and easily put aside. We call the tyrannical demands *imperatives.* If

> we ignore these we do not hear the last of it. The good which we have
> wounded returns to plague us with interminable crops of consequential
> damages, compunctions, and regrets. Obligation can thus exist inside a
> single thinker's consciousness; and perfect peace can abide with him only
> so far as he lives according to some sort of a casuistic scale which keeps
> his more imperative goods on top (1891, WB: 159).

Here James is essentially trying to account for the *bindingness* of certain obligations, and attempting to appeal to how urgent or *pressing* these obligations are to explain it. James tells us each demand is "imperative to the extent of its amount" (1891, WB: 149). We can interpret this as meaning amount of urgency.[67]

James returns to this notion of obligation in his 1888 and 1889 lectures on ethics. There James distinguishes between goods in the sense of "mere objects of preference" and "imperative goods" (1888-9, ML: 185). Now James offers us a slightly less arbitrary definition of obligation:

> The *effectiveness* of a feeling of obligation depends on the circumstances.
> *If not effective*, what we mean by calling it an obligation is that we haven't
> heard the last of it (ML: 185).

He also clarifies his notion of "imperative", defining it as a motive which we yield to, and which "gives us 'no peace' till obeyed" (1888-9 ML: 186). So, both obligation and imperative here are defined pragmatically by James as those demands, claims, or motivations which press us to obey them, and resist being ignored. Irritatingly, James's lecture notes cut off before he can finish his account of what moral imperatives are. But we have enough clues to indicate that a moral imperative is something which has a felt urgency which impels us to obey it, a resistance to being rejected from our accepted system of goods, and the property of returning to "haunt us" if we do reject it.

In the same way that making sure the imperative demands are met within one person's demands is required for that person to be unified, maintaining unity within the social world also requires meeting the genuinely imperative demands. Some demands, when ignored or put aside by those who are not sensitive to them, do not return. Other demands, when quashed, return again and again with increasing intensity. In these cases, we will know we have made a "bad mistake" in quashing these demands, because the "cries of the wounded will soon inform [us] of the fact" (1891, WB: 158). Some

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[67] Gale (1999: 35-37) considers various interpretations of this claim, and concludes that we should think of James as using "amount" to mean the subjective "magnitude" of that desire. Of course, this leads to various typical utilitarian problems, such as evil demons or greedy men desiring immoral things intensely. The *urgency* of a demand, however, is something fallible, in principle public, and less subjective than felt intensity (though felt intensity can be a mark of urgency).

demands, then, are felt to be urgent and imperative, at least by those who make them, and ignoring these demands will result in resistance from those demanders.[68]

So, James points to the difference between demands which are felt to be urgent, and those which are not, to identify genuinely binding obligations. So far, this is ambiguous between the view that there are features of moral experience, independent of any actual thinker, which ground of these feelings of imperativeness, and the view that the felt urgency of certain demands is based on subjective preference. James does not seem concerned about this ambiguity in 1891, but by his lecture notes of 1888-9, he admits that the "feeling of obligation taken alone is thus too wavering and fallible a thing upon which to found a definitive system of ethics" (1888-9, ML: 183). In the next chapter, I'll examine ways in which James can gain more objectivity on his account.

§7.3 LOVE AND REALISATION

In this final section, I'll look at a second instance in which James suggests we have a moral obligation to attend and realise another person's lived world. In "A Certain Blindness in Human Beings" (1899), he suggests that we have an obligation to attend and realise each other in a way analogous with love.

As we've seen, our habits, moral concepts, and inherited common-sense beliefs can assist us when navigating the potentially bewildering chaos of moral relations and obligations, primarily by directing our attention. But these habits, concepts, and common-sense beliefs can also, by the same token, "blind" us to goods which they do not attend to, or which they direct our attention away from. This can mean we find it much more difficult to attend to novel or unusual moral demands, or those more removed from our centres of significance. We are also fundamentally practical creatures, and our attention being

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[68] Many of the metaphors James uses to express that certain "demands" are more imperative involve *sound*, such as the "cries of the wounded", the "voice of complaint", the demands which "call out" for us to meet them (1891, WB: 156-159). We can interpret this is two ways. Firstly, we might think that demands which are *louder* in the sense of being made with more force, authority, or number of voices, are more obligatory. Secondly, we might think that demands which are more *insistent* in the sense of returning to irritate us, or refusing to be ignored, are more obligatory. Taking the first interpretation, as Boyle (1998: 984; 992) explicitly does, leads us to see James as a typical utilitarian in which the *quantity* of demands must be maximised. Taking James in this way, we are lead to typical utilitarian problems such in which the "loudest" claimants, or the claims of the most numerous group, are the most obligatory (Boyle, 1998: 993-4). I am interpreting James as suggesting, with his frequent sound metaphors, that certain demands are shown to be *urgent* or *in-ignorable* in some sense. Thus, those claims which are truly obligatory are so because of a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, measure. See VI.2.

focused on aspects of experience which are practically necessary can often "blind" us to aspects which are morally salient.

So, the focus of our attention can often be directed away from morally salient features of our environment, either due to practical concerns or conflicting habits of attention. It is this phenomenon which James refers to as moral "blindness". In particular, James draws on his idea that nothing can be good or obligatory without some creature's felt demand, to suggest that this blindness is "the blindness with which we are afflicted in regard to the feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves" (1899, TT: 132).[69] Focusing on our own concerns leads to us not seeing the goods of others:

> Hence the stupidity and injustice of our opinions, so far as they deal with the significance of alien lives. Hence the falsity of our judgements, so far as they presume to decide in an absolute way on the value of other person's conditions or ideals (1899, TT: 132).

It is worth noting that James clearly connects moral blindness with *falsity* here, indicating that narrowed attention leads to moral judgements which are *incorrect*, rather than just insensitive. This shows James continuing to entangle the moral and the epistemic.

In explicating how moral blindness works, James distinguishes what we might call a "spectator" view-point and an "actor" or "inhabiter" view-point. The actor or inhabiter holds and acts under the goods and ideals in question. They inhabit the "lived world" of which these goods are a part and feel their significance. The spectator, on the other hand, looks on the actor and their goods, unmoved by their significance, and without inhabiting the lived world of which they make a part. Contrary to the idea that a dispassionate or scientific observer will obtain more truth, James in fact tells us that:

> The spectator's judgement is sure to miss the root of the matter and to possess no truth. The subject judged knows a part of the world of reality which the judging spectator fails to see, knows more whilst the spectator knows less; and wherever there is a conflict of opinion and difference of vision, we are bound to believe that the truer side is the side that feels the more and not the side that feels the less (1899, TT: 133).

In certain matters, then, and matters that are most relevant to ethics, it is a passionate rather than a dispassionate stance which sees more truth.

We can already see that in the seven years since "Moral Philosopher", James has moved in a more realistic direction. He is clearer that our value judgements pick out some real feature of reality, about which we can be right or wrong, and that the person intimately connected with that portion of reality is in a better position to access that truth than a

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[69] James's concept of "moral blindness" will be explored in more detail in the next chapter (VI.3.4).

spectator. The recognition that there are *real* goods other than our own, and which we ourselves might be blind to, leads James to his conclusion about tolerance:

> [This realisation] forbids us to be forward in pronouncing on the meaninglessness of forms of existence other than our own; and it commands us to tolerate, respect, and indulge those whom we see harmlessly interested and happy in their own ways, however unintelligible these may be to us. Hands off: neither the whole of truth, nor the whole of good, is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands (1899, TT: 149).

The insight that goods, just as real as our own, exist, and that there are truths which we do not have access to, leads us to the (epistemic) obligation that we should leave other's goods alone, whether or not we can comprehend them.

The view that passion has epistemic importance follows nicely from the observation that morality (as well as reason) is fundamentally a matter of the direction of attention. Passion, according to James, is a *focusing* force. It directs the attention to an aspect of experience, its relations, and its significance. Or, a more realist way of saying the same thing, feeling the significance of aspects of experience allows us to attend to them and their relations with more dedication. Here's James in the *Principles*:

> If *focalization* [attention] of brain-activity be the fundamental fact of reasonable thought, we see why intense interest or concentrated passion makes us think so much more truly and profoundly. […] When not "focalized," we are scatter-brained, but when thoroughly impassioned, we never wander from the point. None but congruous and relevant images arise (1890, PP 2: 989).

Passion is not a hindrance to the perception of reality. Quite often, it is the *only* way reality can be correctly perceived. This is a central thought in James's "will to believe" thesis (VII.1.4).

A paradigm case of this distinction between the spectator perspective and the actor perspective can be found in "What Makes Life Significant", and the example of two lovers:

> Every Jack sees in his own particular Jill charms and perfections to the enchantment of which we stolid onlookers are stone-cold. And which has the superior view of the absolute truth, he or we? Which has the more vital insight into the nature of Jill's existence, as a fact? Is he in excess, being in this matter a maniac? Or are we in defect, being victims of a pathological anaesthesia as regards Jill's magical importance? Surely the latter; surely to Jack are the more profounder truths revealed; surely poor Jill's palpitating little life-throbs *are* among the wonders of creation, *are*

> worthy of his sympathetic interest; and it is to our shame that the rest of us cannot feel like Jack. For Jack realises Jill concretely, and we do not. He struggles towards a union with her inner life, divining her feelings, anticipating her desires, understanding her limits as manfully as he can, and yet inadequately, too; for he also is afflicted with some blindness, even here (1899, TT: 151).

The person who is acquainted with the intimate facts of another person, their life, their desires, needs and interests, is in possession of more of the "truth" about that person than a disinterested spectator. Even Jack, though, does not have *all* the truth. It is unclear whether James thinks even *Jill* has all the truth about herself. In each case, "[p]rivate and uncommunicable perceptions always remain over" (1899, TT: 4). There are always feelings and elements of experience which we cannot grasp conceptually or linguistically. "Something always escapes" (1909, PU: 146), even from Jill herself.[70]

Seeing as Jill is the person who is *most* in connection with her lived world of significance, she recognises that Jack is in possession of more of the truth than the disinterested spectator. And this leads James to an important claim about obligations we owe to each other:

> Jill, who knows her inner life, knows that Jack's way of taking it – so importantly – is the true and serious way; and she responds to the truth in him by taking him truly and seriously, too […] Where would any of *us* be, were there no one willing to know us as we really are or ready to repay us for *our* insight by making recognizant return? *We ought, all of us, to realize each other in this intense, pathetic, and important way*" (1899, TT: 151, emphasis mine).

Here we see James draw a different conclusion from the conclusion he reached in "A Certain Blindness". That essay moved from the recognition that intimate relation with aspects of experience gave access to more truth, to the negative claim that we should be tolerant and keep our "[h]ands off" (1899, TT: 149). Here, rather, we see a much more positive conclusion. We have an obligation to *realise each other* in an intimate way, analogous to the way two lovers recognise each other.[71]

James recognises that some people will think that having such a realisation obligation is "absurd". It is, after all, impossible to love *everyone.* But James suggests that, seeing as people *do* exist who have an immense capacity "for friendship and for taking delight in other people's lives", and that such people "know more of truth" than others, that the

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[70] See Misak (2008) for a detailed account of the role and limitations that first-person narrative can play in ethical inquiry.

[71] One way of putting this, in Talisse and Aikin's (2005) vocabulary, is that in "A Certain Blindness", James is advocating an *indifferentist modus vivendi* pluralism, whereas in "What Makes Life Significant", James is advocating a *recognitionist modus vivendi* pluralism.

ideal James is presenting "however impracticable to-day, yet contains nothing intrinsically absurd" (1899, TT: 151). So, despite impracticality, we have an obligation to *realise* each other in a way analogous to love. And, failing actually being able to enter into intimate connection with others in this way, we can at least recognise our failings, and allow a recognition of our blindness to make us more "cautious" (1899, TT: 151).[72]

It is clear that James thinks of love as a *kind of attention*, one removed from practical interest or conventional interpretation. By attending to any object of our experience under concepts dictated by our practical purposes, we "mutilate" the reality of that object (1890, PP 2: 959-961). The complex reality of an object, and especially an object as complex as a person, "overflows these purposes" (1890, PP 2: 961). This is why "[n]o abstract concept can be a valid substitute for a concrete reality" (1882, WB: 62). One way of thinking about "love" in the way James is using it here is an attempt to attend to some object or person in their full, complex reality, rather than reduced to any practical purpose or abstract classification.

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[72] Connecting leading the correct ethical life with love is, of course, not unique to James. We've already seen something similar in Peirce's theory (II.6). Indeed, this is not only a traditionally Christian and ideal, but a Platonic one. Plato thinks that love (*eros*) can lead us to knowledge of The Good (e.g. *Symposium* 200a-212a). The primary difference is that James connects this to an *inter-personal* obligation, rather than an abstract one. It is a matter, to return to vocabulary used in Chapter II, of *ethical secondness* rather than *ethical thirdness*. James seems to confirm the importance of interpersonal sensitivity to moral judgement in the following letter to Thomas Wren Ward in 1868:

> For even at one's lowest ebb of belief, the fact remains empirically certain […] that men suffer and enjoy. And if we have to give up all hope of seeing into the purposes of God—or to give up theoretically the idea of final-causes, and of God anyhow as vain and leading to nothing for us, we can by our will make the enjoyment of our brothers stand us in the stead of a final cause, and through a knowledge of the fact that that enjoyment on the whole depends on what individuals accomplish, lead a life so active, and so sustained by a clean-conscience as not to need to fret much.—Individuals can add to the welfare of the race in a variety of ways [… by doing so] you will come in to *real* relations with your brothers, with some of them at least. […] We long for sympathy, for a purely *personal* communication, first with the soul of the World, then with the soul of our fellows—And happy are they who think or know that they have got them […] At least when you have added to the property of the race, even if no one knows your name, yet it is certain that without what you have done, some individuals must needs be acting now in a somewhat different manner. You have modified their life, you are in *real* relation with them, you have in so far forth entered into their being. And is that such an unworthy stake to set up for our good after all? (1868, CWJ 4: 248-249).

For more on the amelioration of the world through our action, see the final chapter (VII.2).

Another way of thinking about love as James uses it is as a *sympathetic engagement with the "lived world" of the other person*. We enter into an intimate engagement with their needs, desires, interests, and so on. This means we attend to the features of experience which they find significant and motivating, which constitutes reality *for them.* As we attend to these elements of experience, we allow ourselves to feel the significance of these elements, and perhaps consent to the reality of them for ourselves. The result, in an intimate relationship, is often the creation of a shared lived world between the two (or more) people in that intimate relationship. In this idea, we can see another reason why love is an important feature of our moral lives for James. As we'll see in the next chapter, moral inquiry should be understood, in part, as the attempt to create or discover a shared ethical world.

With this is mind, we can see James's suggestion that we have an obligation to "realise each other" in a way analogous to love to be another way of looking at the obligation to meet each demand. A demand is an affirmation of some significant element of experience, and the corresponding obligation is to enable the realisation of that element of experience. Here we see that "realising each other" involves attending sympathetically to the lived world of another person, and being motivated by the elements of experience which they find significant. In short, the obligation to attend, and realise, a demand made by a person within the context of a lived world, and the obligation to attend, and realise, a person's lived world more generally, lead to the same results.

As the ethically relevant aspects of love can be talked about in terms of attention, I suspect James's position does not obligate us to *love* each other in a fuller sense. Strictly drawn from James's text, we have three points. Firstly, that general conceptions (as attention directing instruments) and habits of attention will always miss certain aspects of particular situations and persons. Secondly, that inaccurate, inadequate, or abstract habits and concepts can "blind" us to some morally relevant aspects of experience. And, thirdly, that love grants us a certain kind of intimate access to facts and truths about a person which other forms of attention occlude. None of these points imply that there couldn't be some *other* mode of gaining access to the relevant aspects of moral experience. Our obligation is to realise each other, not to love each other.

So, in "The Moral Philosopher" and his 1898 talks, James has given us two different ways of looking at the same account of ethical obligation. On the one hand our obligation is to respond to a demand that some significant element of experience should be seen as significant and be realised. On the other hand, our obligation is to enter into an intimate enough relation with another's lived world that these demands *can* be motivating.

This chapter has offered an interpretation of James's central ethical texts, and provided an understanding of what "demands", "goods", and "obligation" mean on James's

experiential account of ethics. In the next chapter, I draw on this interpretation, and on my interpretation of James's radical empiricism, to provide an account of moral inquiry and objectivity.

Chapter VI:

Inquiry and Objectivity

§1. Radically Empiricist Ethics

The starting assumption of this chapter (and the thesis as a whole) is that we can profitably apply James's work on metaphysics (explored in Chapters I, II, III and IV), to his ethics (explored in Chapter V). I suggest that by doing so, we can provide James's ethics with the objectivity that his ethical texts alone cannot provide.

James should not be averse to this strategy. Metaphysical and ethical inquiries are not held by him to be necessarily isolated. In "Moral Philosopher", James tells us that:

> [t]he chief of all the reasons why concrete ethics cannot be final is that they have to wait on metaphysical and theological beliefs (1891, WB: 159).

The exact ways in which ethical beliefs and metaphysical beliefs are entangled is something which will become clearer as we go on. Here it is sufficient to note that James is *not* saying that either metaphysics or ethics is "first philosophy". In the quote above, James indicates that ethics must wait on metaphysics. In other places, James asserts that our metaphysical beliefs must be responsive to our ethical concerns.[1] The point is not

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[1] Sami Pihlström is a modern interpreter who focuses on the ways in which metaphysics and ethics are entangled for James (see Pihlström, 2009). However, Pihlström tends to interpret this relation to be hierarchical, with ethics being more foundational. Ellen Kappy Suckiel seems to assert ethics as first philosophy when she says that:

hierarchical, but simply that our metaphysical and ethical beliefs must be responsive to each other.

By James's own lights, then, it is not too much of an imposition to apply his metaphysical thought to his earlier ethics. In order to provide an account of how our moral ideals have some reference to the world of our everyday experience, how they can present some objectivity despite their non-physicality, and how they can fit in with the rest of reality, it is necessary to have a metaphysical picture which supports the ethical. And I suggest that in James's "radical empiricism", we can find the account which can meet the metaphysical requirements of his ethics. In this section, I'll give a few reasons for thinking that the application of radical empiricism can assist our understanding of James's ethics (§1.1); give reasons for why James himself recognised the importance of objectivity within ethics (§1.2; §1.3); before giving an outline of exactly what account of objectivity is required for James's account of moral inquiry to function (§1.4). In the following sections, I examine in more detail how we might attain reference (§2) and objectivity (§3) in an account of moral inquiry that cannot appeal to anything other than experience. Finally, I shall briefly examine a previous attempt by James to supply this objectivity through a divine being, explain why this strategy fails, and why James should prefer my "radically empirical ethics" option (§4).

The next and final chapter (VII) is dedicated to exploring a potential problem for the objective account of moral inquiry presented in this chapter. James frequently asserts that moral agents not only *discover* moral truths, but *contribute* to or *create* them. There I shall attempt to unify these two apparently incompatible positions, but it is worth being aware of this tension within the current chapter.

> James thinks the philosophical enterprise is most profoundly assessable in moral terms. Ultimately, the point of philosophy is to clarify the individual's place in the world in order to enrich the possibilities for human fulfilment (Suckiel, 1982: 3).

My suggestion is that James thinks that there is no first philosophy, but that our metaphysical, theological, scientific, practical, and ethical inquiries must be responsive to each other and, ultimately, to experience. If anything deserves the name "first philosophy" in James it is phenomenology.

§1.1 THE POSSIBILITY OF REALISM

When we compare James's ethical and metaphysical projects, it becomes clear not only that they support each other, but that they are articulations of the very same project. I noted this in the introduction, where I suggested that the best way to read James's work was as an attempt to give a fully substantive account of the subject matter of philosophy without appealing to anything non-experiential. Reality, truth, normativity and objectivity all have to be *experiential* according to this radically empiricist project. Their *esse* is *percipi*, as James is fond of saying about both his ethics (1891, WB: 147), and his metaphysics (1903-4, MEN: 31; 1904-5, ERE: 108-9; 1910, SPP: 107).[2] Seen as essentially the same project, we should not be surprised if James's later and more developed metaphysics can shed light on his earlier claims about ethics.

The first thing to notice when we apply radical empiricism to the ethical sphere is that it immediately suggests a certain kind of moral realism. Everything, according to radical empiricism, which is experienceable is by that fact real (1904-5, ERE: 22; 81). Even the most fervent moral sceptic will not deny that we have moral experiences. We encounter things as right, as wrong, as mean, vulgar, atrocious, inspiring, virtuous, and joyous. Some portions of our experience confirm our closely held ideals, and other experiences challenge them. Seeing as we have moral experiences, and seeing as radical empiricism holds that everything which is experienceable is (in some sense) real, then the radical empiricist is *ipso facto* a moral realist.[3]

Of course, this kind of realism is very broad and very cheap indeed. We've seen that James separates reality of this broad kind from objective reality (IV.4). As such, we might find that our moral experiences indicate nothing more objective than our day-dreams about unicorns. Nonetheless, starting from radical empiricist assumptions has a pragmatic effect on our moral inquiry. Starting from "naturalist" or physicalist assumptions means adopting an *a priori* decision to treat only a small subset of experiences as "real". We subsequently face problems trying to explain the validity of moral experiences on this framework, or face strong theoretical pressure to reject the reality of such experiences. Radical empiricism, on the other hand, starts with the assumption that experience is ontologically prior to the interpretation of that experience as either physical or psychical. Experience can be subsequently sorted into these (and

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[2] Perhaps *esse est perceptibilis* (to be is to be perceptible/sensible/experienceable) would be a better Latin phrase to cover James's mature metaphysics than *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived/sensed/experienced). See I.6; §4.1; §4.3.

[3] Brennan is one of the few interpreters of James's moral work to make this connection, and he puts this point succinctly: "if a man has experiences in the moral realm, Radical Empiricism must admit them as being real" (Brennan, 1961: 22).

other) categories (though James thinks many experiences resist easy categorisation into either). But experience as it first appears to us contains values just as much as it contains facts, and the objects in that experience demonstrate moral just as much as physical properties. There is no *a priori* theoretical prescription for according one less reality than the other.

Starting from a radical empiricist starting point already indicates an improvement over the position James presents in "Moral Philosopher". Despite frequently arguing that (outside of natural sciences) the adoption of materialistic assumptions leads to pessimism, James starts "Moral Philosopher" with just these assumptions.[4] He asserts a division between an objective physical world, in which we can find no values, and a subjective psychical world, in which values find their origin and meaning. James's aim in this paper is to reject a kind of strict realism in which our moral judgements refer to some transcendent order completely independent of us. But, given his starting assumptions, rejecting this order left James without anything other than subjective feeling to appeal to in his description of ethics. So, his materialistic starting assumptions lead James to articulate his position in a way which is overly subjectivist, and which creates a tension with his own obvious realist leanings.[5] Radical empiricism helps James avoid this problem.

Further, without starting from the assumption of radical empiricism, it is hard to make sense of James's frequent claims about moral inquiry. If we have only subjective experience to appeal to, and an objective world which rejects moral interpretation, it is hard to see in what sense we might inquire and discover objective truth in the moral sphere. Radical empiricism, on the other hand, allows us to see moral inquiry as being at least *capable* of reaching objective conclusions. When we start from the assumption that all experiences indicate some kind of reality, then we have no reason to suspect that moral experiences are any less susceptible of being the basis of a genuine empirical inquiry than our experiences of physical objects are. Indeed, James in his later work is happy to attribute "vividness of appeal", "interestingness", "agreeableness", "excitingness", "pleasantness" and "intensity" as potentially objective features of immediate experience alongside the more typical duration, extension, shape, size and colour (1905, ERE: 72-76; 1905-1908, MEN: 125; 1909, PU: 32; c. 1910, SPP: 159). These are

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[4] See §1.2 and §1.3 for materialisms connection with pessimism. See Jackman (2004) for an exploration of James's relationship with materialism.

[5] It is this tension which leads to James's introduction of a deity in "Moral Philosopher". God provides a kind of subjectivity which, for beings such as us, is objective. See §4 for an examination of the role that God plays in James's ethics.

the very features which we have seen James previously appeal to as indications of the importance, significance, and practical reality of some demand.[6]

Finally, I suggested in the previous chapter (V) that we should think of moral demands as relational and indexical, in the sense that they obtain between some agent and some element of experience. The fact that James's radical empiricism sees relations as just as real as the things related is another indication of a *prima facie* moral realism. We will return to this point later (§2).

A radical empiricist starting point, then, allows for the possibility of moral realism and an objective account of moral inquiry. Exactly what kind of objectivity is possible in moral inquiry, however, remains to be seen.

§1.2 THE LIMITS OF SUBJECTIVITY

In the previous chapter (V), I argued that James presents an account of ideals in terms of felt significance, and an account of significance in terms of capacity to act. To fully consent to an ideal or take it to be real means being motivated to act under it. We consider (or at least James considers) anyone who holds an ideal but does not act under it to be deficient. But James clearly recognises from the very beginning of his career that no account that solely appeals to subjective feeling will be able to provide us with genuinely motivational ideals.[7]

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[6] Dewey perhaps expresses this view best when defending a methodology which he called "naturalistic empiricism", but which shares the core features of radical empiricism:

> If experience actually presents esthetic and moral traits, then these traits may also be supposed to reach down into nature, and to testify to something that belongs to nature as truly as does the mechanical structure attributed to it in physical science. To rule out that possibility by some general reasoning is to forget that the very meaning and purport of empirical method is that things are to be studied on their own account, so as to find out what is revealed when they experienced. The traits possessed by the subject-matters of experience are as genuine as the characteristics of sun and electron. They are *found*, experienced, and are not to be shoved out of being by some trick of logic. When found, their ideal qualities are as relevant to the philosophic theory of nature as are the traits found by physical inquiry (Dewey, 1925, LW1: 13-4).

[7] Or which appeals to an "ethics of energy" if we want to use Franzese's terms (Franzese 2008; see V.1.3)

A clear example for James's reasoning in this regard can be seen in his "The Dilemma of Determinism" (1884). Here James argues against determinism on both intellectual and ethical grounds. In particular, James is interested in arguing against the "soft determinist" who wants to accept the universal determinism of physical causes, but nonetheless "allow[s] the considerations of good and bad to mingle with those of cause and effect" (1884, WB: 129). According to James the soft determinist is caught in a dilemma between pessimism on the one hand and subjectivism on the other. Neither option allows us to act meaningfully under our ideals. Taking some time to look at James's arguments in this essay will demonstrate James's own suspicion of a purely subjectivist ethics.

James's major case-study in the essay is a particularly heinous murder in Brockton, in which a husband violently killed his wife for no other reason than that she bored him. In a sense that will prove important as we go ahead, James describes the badness of this act in terms of its *lack of fittingness* with a wider and more ideal reality. According to James:

> [w]e feel that, although a perfect mechanical fit to the rest of the universe,
> it is a bad moral fit, and that something else would have really been better
> in its place (1884, WB: 125).

In this way, the Brockton murder is a suitable candidate for regret. Something else should have occurred in its place, which would have been a better (moral) fit with the rest of reality, and we regret that the murder occurred instead.

The determinist, however, cannot make sense of the claim that something else would have been more fitting, because they deny any notion of real possibility. They have to assert that "this Brockton murder was called for by the rest of the universe". Seeing as everything is determined by physical causes, the murder was the only event which could have ever followed the events which proceeded it. In this way, it is "fitting" in the only sense the determinist can make sense of. As such, the determinist "virtually defines the universe as a place in which what ought to be is impossible" (1884, WB: 126). The soft determinist must either reject our feelings of regret as appropriate, and so join the ranks of the hard determinist, or else take as the appropriate object of regret not only this one event, but the whole universe which "called for" and determined this event. But to regret the formation of the whole universe is to accept a kind of extreme pessimism.

If the soft determinist wants to avoid pessimism, they must turn either to optimism or subjectivism. To adopt optimism is simply to deny that the Brockton murder is bad after all. This involves a kind of Panglossian assertion that the universe which contains the Brockton murder is the best possible universe. James holds this view to not only be hopelessly naïve, but also crassly insensitive (because it requires us to *approve* of the Brockton murder, as we approve of the universe it takes place in) and intellectually

problematic (seeing as judgements of regret are incompatible with a universe in which no other event was possible) (1884, WB: 126-7). Most soft determinists, then, adopt the second option: subjectivism.

Subjectivism, as James defines it, is the view that there is nothing good or evil in the universe save moral judgements and feelings. This involves a complete separation of the moral sentiments and "outward facts", and in extreme cases involves the latter becoming seen as "mere perishing instruments" for the production of subjective feeling. In one variant of this kind of subjectivism, which we might call "epistemic subjectivism", we make sense of the negative features of the world by viewing them as conditions for us to learn more about the nature of good and evil. Under epistemic subjectivism, then,

> [t]he world must not be regarded as a machine whose final purpose is the making real of any outward good, but rather as a contrivance for deepening the theoretic consciousness of what goodness and evil in their intrinsic natures are (1884, WB: 128).

We need both negative and positive experiences in order to gain full theoretical knowledge of the good. So, the Brockton murder is excused on the grounds that it contributes to the understanding of our moral feelings. In another variant of subjectivism, which we might call "romantic subjectivism", we make sense of the negative features of the universe by viewing them as conditions for us to experience the full range of human existence. Experiences such as the Brockton murder have a vibrancy and an excitement in their own right, and comparison to such experiences allow us to feel good experiences more keenly.

The problem with subjectivism, according to the James of the "Dilemma", is that it allows us a licence to seek out and perform various negative experiences in the name of deepening our theoretical or sensible understanding of good and evil. James offers this in the form of a slippery slope argument:

> [o]nce dismiss the notion that certain duties are good in themselves, and that we are here to do them, no matter how we feel about them; once consecrate the opposite notion that our performances and our violations of duty are for a common purpose, the attainment of subjective knowledge and feeling, and that the deepening of these is the chief end of our lives – and at what point on the downward slope are we to stop? (1884, WB: 132).

Subjectivists must assert that our "sensibility" is for no "higher purpose", least of all for "the sake of bringing mere outward rights to pass and frustrating outward wrongs". But without some notion of good and bad outside of feeling, subjectivism leads to "every sort of spiritual, moral, and practical license". It disallows nothing, so long as something can be experienced or learnt as a result. And it gives us no reason to perform any act

which does not happen to take our fancy. As such, it encourages a kind of "ethical indifference".[8] Moreover, taking our feelings of moral approbation or affirmation in this subjective way "falsifies the simple objectivity of their deliverance" and turns a "tragic reality" into an "insincere melodramatic exhibition". James often returns to the assertion that without outward reference we are left with a theory of "vanity" in which nothing in the universe other than our sensations and theories matter (1884, WB: 132-136).[9]

The way out of the dilemma James has offered the determinist is not theoretical, but practical. We must take our conduct, rather than our thoughts and feelings, as being of primary importance. But as conduct necessarily aims at some external state of affairs experienced as good or bad, this solution requires that we reject subjectivism entirely. This new philosophy:

> says conduct, and not sensibility, is the ultimate fact for our recognition. With the vision of certain works to be done, of certain outward changes to be wrought or resisted, it says our intellectual horizon terminates. No matter how we succeed in doing these outward duties, whether gladly and spontaneously, or heavily and unwillingly, do them we somehow must; for the leaving of them undone is perdition. No matter how we feel; if we are only faithful in the outward act and refuse to do wrong, the world will in so far be safe, and we quit of our debt towards it. Take, then, the yoke upon our shoulders; bend our neck beneath the heavy legality of its weight; regard something else than our feeling as our limit, our master, and our law; be willing to live and die in its service—and, at a stroke, we have passed from the subjective into the objective philosophy of things, much as one awakens from some feverish dream (1884, WB: 134).

In place of subjectivism, James advocates a philosophy which views our purposes as having a meaning outside of our subjective feeling. Knowledge and sensibility are

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[8] A further problem for subjectivism is that it provides no possible escape from pessimistic experiences, or as James puts it, experiences of "terror at the world's vast meaningless grinding" (1884, WB: 133). These are experiences like any other, encouraged by the materialist and deterministic view-point which has led to subjectivism in the first place. Subjectivism offers no counter or solace for such experiences. As such, it has a tendency to lapse back into the pessimism which it aims to avoid.

[9] Elsewhere James attributes this vanity not just to subjectivism, but materialism:

> [Moral realism] says "The world is a solemn thing everywhere and always, and there are bases for the moral judgement." The […] materialist replies, "What matters […] how I decide, since vanitas vanitatum is the bottom of it all?" Wisdom's watchword for the one, when pushed to extremity is Anaesthesia; for the other, Energy" (1878, EPh: 28, translated from the French at EPh: 336).

Presumably James's thought, explicitly expressed in "Dilemma", is that materialism requires determinism, and determinism leads to subjectivism.

considered valuable only insofar as they can contribute to an objectively meaningful purpose. Considerations outside of our feeling (here James alludes to a Kantian sounding notion of obligation and legality) govern our actions and make them meaningful in a way that subjective considerations cannot.

Accepting this more objective philosophy also requires the rejection of determinism. Our efforts and actions can have no effect in a world that is already entirely determined. Accordingly, James tells us that:

> I cannot understand the willingness to act, no matter how we feel, without the belief that acts are really good and bad. I cannot understand the belief that an act is bad, without regret at its happening. I cannot understand regret without the admission of real, genuine possibilities in the world. Only *then* is it other than a mockery to feel, after we have failed to do our best, that an irreparable opportunity is gone from the universe, the loss of which it must forever after mourn (1884, WB: 135).

Being motivated to act requires some non-subjective notion of good and bad. Recognising some action to be bad requires regret being appropriate. The appropriateness of regret is predicated on some other possibility having been available. So, we are only motivated to act if we feel that there is some real opportunity for something really good to be gained or lost in the universe through our actions. This entails a complete rejection of subjectivism and determinism.

As this section has shown, from very early in his career James was keen to distance himself from ethical subjectivism, which he saw as a pernicious and problematic theory. He connected this rejection with an assertion of the importance of conduct, with the importance of having a non-subjective reference for our ideals, and with the acceptance of a universe in which real possibilities obtain. We should hope, then, that we can provide an account of James's own ethical theory that does not collapse into the very subjectivism he rejected.

§1.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF OBJECTIVITY AND REALISM

We saw in the previous section that in order to act under our ideals and find them meaningful we must consider them to have some reference to, and make some contribution to, a universe outside of our feeling (rejection of subjectivism), and we must consider that universe to be open to multiple possibilities (rejection of determinism). But James has not as yet offered us an indication that the ideals themselves are subject to

possible assessment. This is a second and important aspect of objectivity which James also acknowledged to be necessary to a functional ethical theory.

As we saw in the previous chapter (V), James frequently expressed the view that humanity as a whole was embarked on a moral inquiry to determine what is good, and by what methods "the maximum amount of good" could be "gained and kept" (1891, WB: 157). Seeing ourselves as embarked on a moral inquiry of this sort requires the acknowledgement that there is some kind of objective truth to be had. James addresses this in his notes for his 1888-9 lectures on ethics, in which he examines what it is to seek a *system* in ethics. Given the various conflicting claims of the good, we desire some kind of account of how we organise these competing claims. This is what we mean by a system of ethics. The first thing we must do is acknowledge a distinction between what merely *appears* to be good, and what is *truly* good. And we must also acknowledge that we want *our* goods to be of the true sort. Determining whether or not our ideals are true requires entering into a moral inquiry in which we aim to determine which claims of the good have "authority" and which do not. As James puts it:

> Our philosophic quest for the real system of goods, is a quest for that system which has the real authority behind it. In a subjective sense we enter the moral kingdom, the moment we become serious ethical students. We make the assumption that there *is* a moral kingdom, with an authority in it which we must seek; and so we leave ethical skepticism behind us. The objective problem, however, (what things are goods for that authority?) remains untouched (1888-9, ML: 184).

James's essential point is that wanting to hold our ideals to be true requires the assumption of some discoverable, non-subjective answer about which demands or claims are truly obligatory.[10]

A second sense of objectivity which concerns James is how our moral sentiments and feelings refer to something non-subjective. As we saw in the previous chapter (V), our various ideals and demands are based on our finding objects of experience to be significant when correctly attended to. Were this feeling of significance to have no objective ground then not only would it be foolish to expect any objective end to moral inquiry, but it would actually render that feeling of significance meaningless. According to James the objective reference of our feelings is required for us to find those feelings and, more broadly, the universe of our experience to be meaningful:

> [w]hat an intensely objective reference lies in fear! In like manner an enraptured man and a dreary-feeling fellow are not simply aware of their

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[10] These passages come from James's notes for his lecture on "Recent English Contributions to Theistic Ethics". As such, exactly what is James's own thought, and what is him working through and presenting other people's, is unclear. I return to the notion of God as the source of "real authority" below (§4).

subjective states; if they were, the force of their feelings would all evaporate. Both believe there is outward cause why they should feel as they do […] Any philosophy which annihilates the validity of the reference by explaining away its objects or translating them into terms of no emotional pertinence, leaves the mind with little to care or act for. […] We demand in [the universe] a character for which our emotions and active propensities shall be a match. (1882, WB: 71).[11]

Similar to his rejection of subjectivism in "Dilemma" (§1.2), in this passage James is suggesting that any philosophy which explained *away* our emotions and feelings of significance as having only subjective reference would by that explanation render our feelings meaningless. The full meaning of any ideal requires action, and action requires the motive and power to act, and motive to act requires an admission of real reference. Any philosophical explanation which removes either motive or power to act leads to a sense of meaninglessness or *unheimlichkeit* (1882, WB: 71).

It is this assertion that our moral feelings must have some objective reference, or be responsive to something outside of subjective feeling, that I call James's moral realism. This should be distinguished from the moral realism James attacks, which we might call "*a priori* realism". *A priori* realism holds that there are *a priori* and absolute moral laws which we are attempting to track in our moral inquiry. James sometimes calls his own view "moralism" or sometimes "Absolute moralism", by which he means the view that normativity goes "all the way down" (1882, WB: 85).

We can see this clearly in "The Sentiment of Rationality" (1882) in which James contrasts moralism with materialism. Materialism holds that the world is a "simple brute actuality", and that "it happens to be so" is the deepest judgement we can make about the world. Moralism holds that normative judgements are just as pertinent to phenomena as judgements about the existence of physical objects, and that they refer to something real in the universe. Another way of putting the difference is that whereas materialism can only offer descriptive accounts of reality, the moralist aims to provide genuinely normative accounts. As James puts the absolute moralist position:

[the person] who believes this to be a radically moral universe must hold the moral order to rest on either an absolute and ultimate *should*, or on a series of *shoulds* all the way down (1882, WB: 85).[12]

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[11] This passage was originally in "Rationality, Activity and Faith", published in the *Princeton Review* in 1882, before finding its way into James's second edition of the "The Sentiment of Rationality". James also returns to the passage in his chapter on the "Perception of Reality" in his *Principles* (1890, PP 2: 940).

[12] Reprinting this 1882 paper in the 1897 *Will to Believe and Other Essays*, James adds the following footnote:

The choice James offers the moralist here is the choice between monist moral realism or pluralist moral realism. James himself, of course, advocates the pluralist option (1882, WB: 85-6; see VII.1.2 and Chapter III).

James points to two major pragmatic effects that differentiate materialism from moralism. The first involves the motivation for acting morally. The second concerns our behaviour when our moral ideals are put to the test. First, the motivation point. Because the materialist (or subjectivist) holds that the words "good" and "evil" have no purchase on the world outside of our "subjective passions and interests", they can only ultimately appeal to these subjective features when motivating moral action. Thus, when the materialist refuses to break a promise, for instance, this cannot be due to some sense of obligation, but must be due to certain facts about the way society is structured, and certain facts about their own human interests, which make it inconvenient or unbeneficial for them to break that promise. The absolute moralist, on the other hand, is not only motivated by the thought that it is in their "social interests" to keep the promise, but by the thought that it is "best for [them] to have those interests, and best for the cosmos to have [people so motivated]" (1882, WB: 85). Interestingly, James admits that both parties are motivated by their interests, but holds that the interests of the moralist are responsive to a wider notion of normativity.

The second difference concerns what we do when confronted with difficulty in actualising our ideals. It is consistent for the materialist, at least of the romantic subjectivist kind, to feel and be motivated by ideals. The real practical difference occurs when those ideals are pressured, when their actualisation conflicts with the current environment, or when achieving them requires an effort which is not itself pleasurable. In these circumstances, seeing as the moral feelings are "mere data" and neither "good nor evil in themselves", the subjectivist may choose to alleviate the tension between their moral ideals and the environment by "toning down the sensitiveness of the feelings". If the moral feelings have no deeper significance, then we are free to "pervert them or lull them to sleep by any means at his command". The moralist, on the other hand, is not free to do this. They treat their moral feelings and ideals as referring to something more objective than their own subjective interests. When their ideals clash with the current environment, they must fight for their ideals no matter how much personal strife it might cause them. As such, they can face great problems in their interactions with the world:

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in either case, as a later essay explains […] the *should* which the moralist regards as binding upon *him* must be rooted in the feeling of some other thinker, or collection of thinkers, to whose demands he individually bows (1897, WB 85n5).

The later essay James is referring to is "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life". As such, this footnote is confirming that moralism or realism is the correct way to read James's position in "Moral Philosopher", despite the apparent subjectivism entailed in rooting normativity in other people's claims and demands.

"[r]esistance then, poverty, martyrdom if need be, tragedy in a word – such are the solemn feasts of [the realist's] inward faith" (1882, WB: 86).[13]

James not only expressly rejects moral subjectivism, then, but he gives us substantial pragmatic reasons to adopt moral realism. Without an account of how our moral feelings refer to something non-subjective, and without an account of how we can decide which of a number of competing claims are obligatory and which are not, we will be severely limited in our moral inquiry, in our finding the universe to be a meaningful place, and in our actual moral motivations. It will be the job of the next two sections to provide an account of moral reference and moral objectivity (§2; §3), but first I shall say more about what James takes to be the shape of moral inquiry.

§1.4 ON THE POSSIBILITY OF MORAL INQUIRY

As I mentioned above, the notion of moral inquiry requires us to think that there is some objective truth to be had about our ideals and their realisation. What is the structure of this inquiry, and how does it lead us to truth about moral matters?

We have already seen that in his "Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind as Correspondence" (1878), James offers us an early account of what he meant by moral inquiry (see V.2.3). There he called demands "brute affirmations" and also "postulates", and suggested that the validity of those postulates depended on "the general consensus of experience as a whole" in the sense that the "formula which proves to have the most massive destiny will be the true one". A true ideal will find that experience agrees with it in the long run, whereas our thought will be "coerced away from them if they are wrong" (1878, EPh: 17).[14]

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[13] Another way of putting this point is that the moralist or moral realist can adopt the strenuous mood, whereas the materialist or subjectivist has no reason to do so (see §3.8, below). James is happy to say that in most situations the materialist and the moralist will act the same. When, however, we face situations in which our societal norms are not sufficient to decide our behaviour, then the subjectivist will act on their own interests, and the realist has the possibility of acting according to a higher ideal. In such "lonely emergencies of life […] then routine maxims fail, and we fall back on our gods", the pragmatic difference between the two characters becomes apparent (1882, WB: 86). Exactly how rare these situations are, however, is not clear, seeing as James will later say that *every* moral decision is essentially unique, and creates a world in which our previous moral rules are not sufficient (1891, WB: 158; VII.2.1).

[14] In the same passage, James makes the apparently contradictory statement that "[o]ur respective hypotheses and postulates help to shape the course of thought" (1878, EPh: 17). I aim to resolve this apparent tension in the next chapter.

This amounts to saying that moral inquiry should be in principle no different from natural scientific inquiries into physical objects and laws. The only mark that we ever have of something's objectivity is its "coerciveness, in the long run, over thought". We count physical objects as objective facts only because they "coerce sensation". We find ourselves unable to think in any other way, they resist our attempts to imagine them differently, and they physically resist us when we try and move past them. Any ideal which coerced us in a similar way, and which was "fated to grasp us" in the long run of experience, would be just as objective and real as a physical object which did the same (1878, EPh: 21-22).

Though we have seen, in Chapter IV, that this view is complicated and nuanced somewhat in James's metaphysical work, the fundamental assertion remains constant. The central empiricist claim is that the only sense we can make of the claim that something is objective is that our experience convinces us of this fact; that attempts to ignore or reject this fact result in its persistence; that it fits with the rest of our knowledge about the world; and that other people also confirm the coerciveness of this feature of experience. This is what James means when he tells us that "if the total drift of thinking [or experience] continues to affirm it, that is what [the empiricist] means by its being true" (1896, WB: 25).[15] James's simple point is that *were* any elements of our moral life to

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[15] Cooper (2003) considers whether such a view commits James to a Peircean account of truth in the moral sphere, in which truth was "what would be agreed to by scientists in an ideal future state" (2003: 416). Cooper correctly denies the equivalence with Peirce's view, but for the wrong reasons. According to Cooper, we ought to deny the counter-factuality of Peirce's claim, such that

> [m]oral truth for James is mind-dependent, dependent on an actual future meeting of minds. A claim about objective moral truth makes itself a hostage to fortune in which that meeting takes place (Cooper, 2003: 417; see 2002: 226).

Jackman (2004) appears to holds the same view:

> Objective or "absolute" truth requires that we *actually* reach a stable consensus about various questions, and it is not enough for there to be one which we *would have* reached had we been able to investigate longer (Jackman, 2004: 23).

If Cooper and Jackman are right, and the objective truth of our moral states depends on the *actual* consensus of people in the distant future, then James is committed to such absurdities as our moral beliefs being untrue until such an actual agreement occurs, and then suddenly being made true, or our moral beliefs having no objectivity at all in the event of some contingent accident preventing such a consensus from taking place. James in fact makes truth, in all spheres, consist in the verifi*ability* of the proposition, rather than its verifi*cation* (1908, ML: 442; I.6.3). James does not deny the counter-factuality of Peirce's account. But, unlike Peirce, he does leave room for people who are not disinterested scientists to participate meaningfully in ongoing moral inquiry, as we shall see (§3.1).

demonstrate these features, then given that this is our only criterion of objectivity, we would have to consider them just as objective as facts about physical objects.[16]

An immediate problem seems to emerge with this appeal to "coerciveness" as an indication of moral objectivity. We can "coerce" thought in many ways which do not seem conducive to objectivity. I could murder everyone who disagreed with me, and in that way, my ideals would indeed prove to be coercive over thought in the long run. But they would not be "objective" in anything other than a trivial sense. The fact that James wants to exclude this type of illegitimate coercion can be seen in his appeal to the notion of certain features of experience being "fated" to coerce us.

Another problem concerns James's statement that the reality of some thought is proportionate to the way in which it grabs us. As we saw in the previous chapter (V), James points to features of an experience such as interestingness, seriousness, urgency and intensity, or *significance* in a word, as the marks by which we attribute reality to some object of experience. However, these features seem like very subjective features upon which to predicate objectivity.

To make James's proposed account of moral inquiry non-arbitrary, then, we need two things. Firstly, we need a plausible sense of a reality outside of our subjectivity to which our various "postulates" about the good are responsive to, and an account of how they might refer to this reality. The features which James points to as indicators of moral validity (namely: interest, significance, urgency, and the capacity to grasp us) need to be more objective than they appear to be. Secondly, we need some non-coercive procedure which would lead us reliably to a true conclusion, rather than just arbitrary consensus. This is the difference between scientific inquiry and the simple eradication of people who disagree with us. The first without the second would result in some things which we found to be interesting (more or less objectively) being dogmatically asserted as the only things which were valuable. The second without the first would lead to an inquiry which would have no basis in anything objective, and so no chance of reaching anything non-arbitrary as a conclusion.

It is providing an account of these two features which will concern us for the majority of the rest of the chapter. First, I shall argue that the application of radical empiricism to James's ethical theory allows us to see features such as "fittingness", "interestingness", "seriousness" and "significance" as potentially objective (§2). And secondly, I shall look at what procedure James advocates for reaching truth in moral inquiry (§3).

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[16] See Ruth Anna Putnam (2006) for a more detailed examination of the similarities between James's conception of objective inquiry in the natural and the ethical sciences.

§2. Applying Radical Empiricism: Relations and Reference

In the previous chapter (V) I argued that moral demands are relational and indexical. Demands are relational in the sense that they obtain between some organism and its environment (including other organisms), but are reducible to neither. They are also indexical, in the sense that they indicate some aspect of experience which will reveal itself to be significant when attended to correctly. Good emerges from a demand when it is satisfied or realised. This section will have more to say on exactly what this realisation consists in.

The primary difference between radical and classical empiricisms concerns their position on relations. Unlike classical empiricism, the radical variant accepts both conjunctive and disjunctive relations as real (VI.1.3). Conjunctive relations (such as "nextness" and "similarity") are features of experience which unify our experience, and which can lead us from one experience to another. According to James's radical empiricism the universe is not unified through a common substance, or through being cognised by some absolute mind, or through a strict and universal set of physical laws. The universe of experience hangs together by its edges, linked in a vast web of connections through these unifying conjunctive relations. These relations have a vital role in our cognition. What an idea being practically true means, for James, is that it can lead us through a series of conjunctive relations to an experience which confirms it. These relations need not be intellectual. As experienceable relations, often they are more sensed or felt than conceptualised (IV.1.3; 2.1).

This section aims to explore this notion of real relations when applied to James's moral theory. In doing so, I hope to indicate how feelings such as "significance" and "imperativeness" can be cognitive of objective relations. First, we shall look at what the application of this thesis of radical empiricism tells us about demands (§2.1); following that we shall look at the ways in which we can think of the "imperativeness" of some demands as an objective feature of experience (§2.2); we shall look at how the radical empiricism account of reference can be applied to James's ethics (§2.3); we'll look at how to understand James's statements about "brain-born intuitions" (§2.4); and finally give an account of how our demands are responsive to reality (§2.5).

§2.1 DEMANDS AND SATISFACTIONS

First, let us recap the nature of demands that we discovered in the previous chapter (V). The content of any demand is that some significant object of experience is worthy of being realised. Another way of putting this is that we *affirm* or *consent to* some reality when we make such a demand. The affirmation of the reality of some object involves the motivation to act appropriately towards it (if it is already a part of objective reality), or a motivation to bring it about (if it is not yet a part of objective reality). Our "lived worlds" or our "practical realities" are made up of the things which we affirm in this sense, those things which we habitually attend to and find significant, as well as the things related to them. The satisfaction of any demand counts as a "good", and satisfaction means the realisation or actualisation of the significant object demanded.

It follows from our explication of what a demand *is*, that the full meaning of any demand cannot be understood in a disinterested way. We might be able to understand what the referent of some demand is without understanding the significance of the object. But a demand is always issued from a lived context, and entreats us to attend to the significance of the object in question. To understand the full meaning of a demand requires us to in some sense enter into a "sympathetic understanding" with the object in question, and with the lived context in which it is revealed as significant (see V.7.1; V.7.3).

The difference between understanding the referent of some demand and feeling its significance is the difference between what has elsewhere been called the static and dynamic meanings of some term (IV.2.2; V.2.2). A static meaning is the meaning some term has when it is abstracted from the context of relations it has with other terms. The dynamic meaning of some term, by contrast, is the meaning that it has when taken in the context of its actual and potential relations with other terms. Static meanings are useful for grasping and manipulating particular elements of experience for practical purposes. Concepts, as James understands them, are instances of static meanings. The problem occurs when we treat static meaning as the sole kind of meaning. This would be an instance of vicious intellectualism.[17] Dynamic meanings might be less useful for practical purposes, but they are treated by James as being closer to reality. The dynamic meaning of some object emerges in a context of felt relations which James calls "the fringe" (IV.2.2). These relations are innumerable, many of them are difficult to delineate or differentiate, and they are often more felt than thought. Thus, the dynamic meaning of

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[17] "Vicious intellectualism" is the name James gives to the fallacy of assuming the whole nature of some object is suitably delimited by a static concept (1909, PU: 32). In *Some Problems*, James explores various instances of this fallacy, stating that "[i]ntellectualism draws the dynamic continuity out of nature as you draw the thread out of a string of beads" (1910, SPP: 48-51).

some term is often far vaguer than its static meaning. James talks about a "field of view" in this sense. Any part of our field of view is open to attention and analysis in static terms, but doing so removes our attention from the whole field, and so we lose the dynamic sense of how everything inter-relates.

The vague nature of dynamic meanings means that they are incapable of accurate expression. Any expression of them must be treated as an indication, rather than as a definitive articulation. As James puts it in his Miller-Bode notebook:

> The problem is to *state* the intuitive or live constitution of [some object] without paradox. One can do so only by approximation, awakening sympathy with it, rather than assuming logically to define it, for logic makes all things static. As living, no *it* is a stark numerical unit. They all radiate and coruscate in many directions; and the manyness is due to the plurality round about them (1908, MEN: 125).

As "living", or considered in terms of dynamic meaning, no object is completely independent. It is connected with innumerable other elements of experience through actual and possible relations (which are also experiential). If we subscribe to James's assessment that logical analysis can only deal with static meanings, and static meanings require us to abstract from this lived context, then it follows that logical analysis is limited in what it can achieve in ethical contexts. Ethical demands concern attending to objects of felt significance, and felt significance requires seeing that object in the context of actual or possible relations with other objects. As such, understanding the significance of a demanded object requires "awakening sympathy" with that object and its context.

There are two things to draw from this discussion of felt significance as dynamic meaning. The first concerns the moral obligation. The second concerns the satisfaction of demands. I will take each in turn.

We have seen that on James's theory, every demand carries with it an obligation to be met. Obligation is not a matter of our claims being subject to some external standard of veracity. It is rather a matter of the significance that some object demonstrates when we attend to it. It is impossible to be motivated by any purely abstract demand. When we are motivated by the obligation a demand places on us, it is a matter of "life answering to life", rather than a matter of abstract duty (1891, WB: 149-150; see V.7). We are now in a better position to understand why James insists on this point. If the content of a demand is that some object of felt significance ought to be realised, then the only way we can appreciate this demand is by entering into a "sympathetic relation" with the context of that object, and so apprehending its dynamic meaning. In this way, we will or will not be motivated to fulfil the demand based on this apprehended dynamic meaning. Limiting ourselves to static meanings when dealing with alien demands, however, severely prevents our capacity to be motivated by demands that we do not already feel

the significance of. This is why James places the emphasis he does on love (V.7.3). Love involves a sympathetic engagement with the other person's lived world. In such an intimate connection, we are better able to see the dynamic meaning of the objects the other finds significant, and so be motivated by their demands.

The second thing to explore is the ways in which relational demands are satisfied or realised. We have seen that the dynamic (or "living") meaning of any object concerns the actual and potential relations that object can enter into. In the "Miller-Bode" notebooks, James uses the metaphor of a wireless message to explain his account:

> In the physical world, altho a wireless message radiates on all sides, it is effective only where it finds an adequate receiver. Some centres are transparent, others opake [sic] to one another. Effect goes with opacity. In *real* terms opacity *means* effect, response, live relation, influence, sympathy, antipathy, etc. […] The variety which an *it* manifests thus depends on the other *its* which stand in live relation to it. They elicit its modal possibilities when they interact with it. […] A "being" is no dead unit […] Being is only realized in couples (1908, MEN: 125).

In this passage, James is going beyond the claim that understanding the meaning of any object requires understanding its actual and potential relations. James is here expressing the view that the *existence* of any object is dependent on it entering into actual relations with other objects.[18] The actualisation of its various possibilities requires it entering into actual relations with other objects. So, though James is happy to assert that the possibilities of some object can be considered as real outside of any actual "receivers", to be actualised or realised an object requires one or many "live relation[s]" with other things. Existence is essentially relational.

Realising (or satisfying) some demand means bringing its object into relation with other objects.[19] We've already seen this idea at work to some extent in our discussion of

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[18] Lamberth makes a similar claim. He interprets James as holding the view that:

> [b]oth particulars and wholes depend on […] relations for their very identity, their factuality, and certainly their reality (Lamberth, 1999: 19).

The relational properties of any object are determinate of its existence.

[19] In general, James uses the word "satisfaction" when talking about an ideal or concept being shown to accord with reality. "Satisfaction", then, refers to the various experiences which confirm the truth of our ideas (the satisfactions appropriate will be different depending on the idea). It is in this sense in which he says, in *The Meaning of Truth* (1909):

> I am […] postulating here a standing reality independent of the idea that knows it. I am also postulating that satisfactions grow *pari passu* with our approximation to such reality (1909, MT: 88).

connection between belief and will (V.4). There we saw that the difference between belief-like and desire-like mental states was not a psychological one, but was dependent on the relation that state had with its environment. We can now express this difference in terms of relations. A belief was an affirmative state which had a real relation to an environment. When affirmed, and acted upon, the object of the assertion was found to already exist in live relations with other elements of experience. This is what James meant when he said the affirmation was "made real" by "nature" (1890, PP2: 948; V.4). Willing was an affirmative state which had only a potential relation with the environment. It required some action in order to be "made real". In the terminology laid out above, a belief-like state has "found its receiver", whereas a desire-like state must still be "picked up" by some receiver in order to be actualised.

So, the realisation of some ideal requires its object to enter into live relations with other objects and elements of experience. This is relatively simple if our ideal simply requires some action on our part. If my ideal is to eat a sandwich, a very few actions can result in the realisation of that ideal. However, in more complex cases, other humans and their actions often form the majority of our environment. Our ideals can often not be realised any other way than by other people consenting to their reality, and acting to bring them about (or at least not preventing us from doing so). This means that we are, to a very large extent, responsible for the formation of each other's lived worlds.[20] We are the "receivers" which can result in an ideal being realised or not.

James often asserts that acting according to our ideals or faiths is a risk.[21] By this, James usually means that we are acting upon an hypothesis about the world which has not yet been shown to be correct.[22] That is, we are taking an epistemic risk. But the analysis I've offered in this section indicates another sense that we are at risk when asserting and acting under our ideals. Insofar as our lived world is made up of things which we find to be significant, and the realisation of these significant objects is dependent on other people "receiving" them, then we are at risk insofar as we put our faith in things which other people are required to actualise. We are in this sense vulnerable to each other. In all but the most trivial cases the object of a demand is of central importance to the other person. Insofar as we identify habitual centres of attention with self, what is at stake in the acceptance or rejection of these demands is our sense of self, and our sense that the world has meaning or significance. It in this way that we should understand James's assertion that we have an obligation to *realise* each other (V.7.3).

In the case of ideals, this often requires us *bringing about* or *realising* these ideals in order to achieve this satisfaction. But the two ideas are separable. We might *realise* an idea, only to now have access to the experience required to show us that it is *unsatisfactory*.

[20] See V.7.1

[21] E.g. 1882, WB: 89; 1896, WB: 52; 1878, EPh: 337; 1889-1901, MEN: 313.

[22] This idea will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter, see (VII.1.4)

We should not confuse the legitimacy of the demand with its actually being realised. We realise many demands which we perhaps should not, and habitually ignore demands which deserve to be realised. However, the capacity to convince an attentive observer of the significance of your demanded object *is* considered a mark of the demand's legitimacy, as we shall see. This section has aimed to provide us with a more complete account of the context in which demands are made, find their significance, and what it is for them to be realised.

§2.2 THE CHAOS OF OBLIGATION AND IMPERATIVENESS

James tells us two things about obligation that it is difficult to square. He tells us that *every* demand comes with an obligation to be met. But he also tells us that not every demand *can* be satisfied, seeing as many demands are incompossible. As such, James leaves us no way of determining which demands we ought to meet when they come into conflict, seeing as both seemingly carry identical obligations to be realised. If no demand is more obligatory than the other, and we cannot satisfy all demands, then James appears to reject the possibility of creating any non-arbitrary system of ethics which allows us to organise these competing claims. We are left with something which resembles the "blooming, buzzing confusion" which James suggests is the purest form of immediate sensation. And this is not a mistake on James's part. James presents us with this chaos of obligation in order to reject the idea there is any given *a priori* reason, standard, or authority which will act as an infallible guide for what our obligations really are.[23]

This problem is practically identical with the problem we saw him face in his radical empiricism in Chapter IV. There, James called everything which is experiential "real". He did so, in part, to avoid appeals to something non- or trans-experiential to provide

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[23] A connected problem, pointed out by various interpreters and critics of James (e.g. Slater 2009: 93; Roth 1969: 66-71; Talisse and Aikin, 2011: 7) is that James's statement that every demand carries an obligation to be met entails that even apparently abhorrent demands have equally legitimate claims to be met. My answer to the problem of the "chaos" of demands will also address this concern. James is certainly not suggesting that every demand is equally legitimate. As James puts it in "Dilemma of Determinism" pluralism does not entail that "everything that is physically conceivable is also morally possible", it just entails that there is more than one possible alternative that "really *tempt* our will" (1882, WB: 122). The options which are *really* tempting will be constrained by features of our personal biographies and temperaments, as well as our cultural, intellectual, and empirical environment. Some demands will be rejected because they come at too high a cost to other demands, some because they conflict with "brain-born" intuitions, some because they go against cultural norms which should be seen as the results of our ongoing moral inquiry.

an account of objective reality. The problem which emerged was: if everything which is experiential is by that fact real, how is it that we determine what objective reality really is? In his ethics, James has called everything which is demanded obligatory. He does so, in part, to avoid appeals to something non- or trans-experiential to provide an account of obligation. The corresponding problem which emerges is: if every demand carries an obligation to be met, then how do we determine what is truly obligatory?

What we need is a way for James to distinguish between demands which carry objective obligations to be met, and those which only *appear* obligatory. In extracting James from the corresponding problem of distinguishing fantasy from reality, I suggested that James has three experiential notions to appeal to: the tension of certain experiences, their function, and their context (IV.4.3). I think we can find the loose corollaries of these notions in the notion of felt imperativeness, objective moral reference (§2.3), and the felt fitness of some demand (§2.4). Generally speaking, James's strategy is the same in the metaphysical and the ethical spheres. By examining the features of our own experience, and the experience of others, over time we can determine which elements of our experience are "coercive" in a way which is indicative of reality, and which are not.

One mark that James has already indicated that some demand deserves to be met more than another was the *felt imperativeness* of that demand (V.7.2). At the time, James had no way to indicate that such a feeling was anything other than a merely subjective measure. Under radical empiricism, however, imperativeness can be seen as a potentially objective property of immediate experience. Felt imperativeness meant an experiential urgency, and a refusal to be ignored or rejected. Some demands return with force when we try to reject them, or leave a sense of regret when they are ignored. Other demands are easily put aside, and come with few repercussions when ignored. In his notes on ethics (1888-9), James contrasts obligation with mere inducements to act:

> Inducements are things from which we can free ourselves, obligations return. The sense that we *ought* to pursue the right accompanies the feeling of its *rightness* apart from return, however, it isn't because it returns that it is an obligation – but because it is an obligation that it returns. In itself it is a peculiar emotion, a sort of stinging emotion, not necessarily impulsive, but rather inhibitive, which accompanies the idea of certain acts, and which, if the acts are not done, returns. More one cannot say about it (1888-9, MEN: 306).

Here James is suggesting that the quality of being resistant to rejection is not constitutive of a true obligation, but only a mark of it. The feeling of imperativeness is an emotion which accompanies this kind of resistant obligation and by which we know them.

Let us return to James's example of the Brockton murder to elaborate. Considering the abhorrence that he feels at the act, James tells us that "[t]here are some instinctive reactions which I, for one, will not tamper with" (1884, WB: 136). His disgust at the act

of murder is an instinctual and sentimental response. It is marked in part by his regret at the occurrence, and by his incapacity to "violate" his sense of "moral reality" by thinking otherwise. Attempting to see it as a *moral fit* with the rest of the world is something which resists our moral imagination.[24] We regret the murder happening, and we find this feeling of regret quite appropriate. We feel the force of the claim that we should not perform such acts, and we find anyone who does not feel this force to be deficient. It is in this sense that we should think of James's *felt imperativeness*.

The property of resisting being thought away is one of the key indications of something's reality (IV.4). Indeed, it is this quality which James most often refers to when he talks about an experience being "coercive over thought" (1878, EPh: 21-22; §1.4). The reason we treat tangible objects as the paradigm case of reality is precisely because they so obviously and consistently demonstrate this property of resistance.

Of course, just like the feeling of "tension" in his metaphysics, the feeling of imperativeness is only going to get us so far. As James recognises,

> [t]he feeling of obligation taken alone is [...] too wavering and fallible a thing upon which to found a definitive system of ethics. Its data must themselves be compared, discussed & judged (1888, ML: 183-4).[25]

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[24] There might be some connection to be drawn here with recent work in aesthetics regarding the problem of "imaginative resistance". The problem concerns an apparent mismatch between our capacity to consent to factual propositions in fiction which contradict factual propositions in reality, and our inability to do the same for certain moral propositions, such as "[i]n killing her baby, Griselda did the right thing; after all, it was a girl" (Walton and Tanner, 1994: 37). James might want to suggest that our incapacity to imagine the *rightness* of certain things, even in fictional settings, is the right kind of evidence for factoring into moral inquiry. This might be one way (among others) in which literature can be more enlightening to moral inquiry than ethical treatises can be (1891, WB: 159). See Todd (2009: 187-198) for a good overview of the imaginative resistance literature.

[25] James puts this more strongly in his Notes on Ethics (1888-9):

> As regards the feeling of *Obligation* or Character of *Imperativeness* it is no exclusive apanage of moral goods – any good may come to the mind with it, in somebody; and any good be without it in somebody else. It cannot be used therefore as an uniform mark by which the rational investigator may recognize which goods are *true* goods. – The most we can say is something like this, that we can probably decide no thing to be good which *somebody* doesn't feel as imperative; and that *men in general* will only recognize their imperative goods as real goods. The philosopher must decide amongst many goods, all alike imperative, which are to be reckoned the truer (1888-9, MEN: 308-9).

Besides reiterating that the character of imperativeness is not an infallible mark of a true good, James expresses the (very) modest view that nothing can be called good unless *someone* would feel it to be imperative. In short, felt imperativeness is a necessary but not sufficient indication of

Referring only to our *own* sense of imperativeness will not give us any objective sense of what it really obligatory. We have to compare these feelings with the feelings and judgements of other people. Were it to be found that everyone who attended sympathetically to the object of some demand found it to be significant, then this would be good grounds for asserting it to be an objective good. And if everyone felt that significance in an imperative and urgent way, in the sense that it resisted our attempts to imagine it differently or ignore it, then this would be grounds for asserting it to be truly obligatory. Such a demand would be "coercive over thought" in the way which counts as a mark of some experience's objectivity.

§2.3 REFERENCE AND VALIDITY

I have argued that James can supply a defensible account of reference through the relational features of radical empiricism and his notion of the fringe (IV.2). I have also argued that we should see demands as indexical in the sense of "pointing" towards and affirming some object which will show itself to be significant under the correct attention (V.2-3; 6). And we have seen that James predicates the meaningfulness of ideals, and their capacity to motivate, on their having some reference to something outside of subjective feeling (§1.3). This section draws the work in previous chapters together to provide an account of moral reference.

The account of reference James offers in his radical empiricism is based on the pragmatist assertion that the meaning of some idea is its capacity to correctly predict future experience. For some idea to refer to an object is for that idea to be able to lead us successfully, through a series of conjunctive relations, to either a direct acquaintance with that object or its immediate surroundings (1907, P: 97-8, 102; 1909, MT: 88). The most perfect form of this kind of reference is when an idea leads us "so close that we and the reality should *melt together*" (1909, MT: 88). By this James means that an absolutely true idea would be identical with the object it refers to (1904, ERE: 10; 39; IV.2.1).

How is this idea meant to work in the case of a moral proposition, idea, or judgement? In more or less the same way. We have seen that the best way to understand our demands are as *hypotheses* about the good (V.2.3; 4). In scientific inquiry, our hypotheses refer to their objects if, when we perform some action, then we will be reliably lead to some experience, and if when others perform the same actions, then they too achieve the

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the true good. Philosophers will have to appeal to something other than felt imperativeness to decide which are the true goods.

same experiences. This is the same as saying that a true idea leads us through a series of conjunctive experiences to a direct experience of the object it refers to, or to that object's immediate surroundings. My assertion's failure to lead another to an experience of this kind should be taken to indicate the failure of that assertion to refer to something real. A demand is an hypothesis in a similar way. They point to some object and affirm it as significant. As such, our ideas regarding this object's significance should be able to guide us better in dealing with the object, we should expect it to reliably lead us to an experience of that object's significance, and we should not expect to experience disappointments regarding that object's worth. We should also expect our assertions about the significance of the object to guide other people to an experience of that object's significance.

Perhaps we should consider an example. Say that it is my hypothesis that factory farming is cruel and immoral. This hypothesis might have arisen as a result of a spontaneous affective intuition (§2.4), or perhaps as a result of careful attention to the facts of factory farming. Nonetheless, I have come to feel that animal lives are significant, and that treating them in this way is abhorrent. My demand that such practices stop, or my demand that people attend to the significance of animal lives, must be considered an hypothesis. I must hope that other people who carefully attend to the kinds of experience that my demand is directing them towards would reach similar conclusions, and would have similar affective responses. Were it the case that other careful attenders did *not* feel the same, then over a long enough time frame, the community of inquiry would reach the (fallible) conclusion that factory farming was (to the best of our knowledge) not immoral.

James consistently holds that two features indicate the validity of some idea: its verifiability, and its coherence with other true beliefs. A true idea refers us to an object in a way that leads us to a verification experience. But it should also fit in with "the order of previously admitted truths", as much as possible (1907, ERE: 290). Often a new perception, hypothesis, or idea that shows itself to be verifiable can challenge previously admitted truths (§3.5). But, like good common-sensists, we should try to limit the strain which we place on our previously verified ideas (I.5).

The conjunctive relations which lead to the verification of some idea do not have to *actually* be followed in order to be true. It is enough to know that *were* they to be followed that they *would* lead (on a long enough time line) to a direct experience of the object or its immediate surroundings.[26] Otherwise, it would not be true that you were mortal until you died, and it would the case that "a man ceases to be married as soon as the wedding ceremony is over" (1908, ML: 442). If conjunctive relations now exist which could be

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[26] This is the important difference between the indicative and subjunctive interpretations of the pragmatic maxim, as explored in I.6.2.

followed to a verification experience, then the idea if virtually true even if never actually verified (1909, MT: 68; see 1907, P: 100; IV.1.5). In exactly the same way, an object can be virtually significant without anyone having yet experienced this significance. In order to make this claim, we just have to assert that some object *would* be found to be significant by anyone who sympathetically attended to it, and that the relations which could lead to that verification experience are more or less existent. This allows James to say that some act can be truly obligatory, and some object truly good, even before we discover this to be the case.

This idea is vague, and deliberately so. James is a pluralist about reference. Different demands and claims call for different accounts of how they lead to their satisfaction, verification, or conclusions (III.2.3). Each different affirmation will produce a different kind of leading and verification. As usual, James is not aiming to provide us with a definitive account of how we verify any particular proposition. He is providing a meta-philosophical account of how we should think of reference in a purely experiential system. And I am supplying an account of how this theory of reference can be applied to moral propositions.

§2.4 SPONTANEOUS INTUITIONS

In the previous chapter, we saw that James occasionally appeals to types of moral experience which he calls "brain-born intuitions" (1891, WB: 143-4; V.1.2). The exact nature of these intuitions is unclear, but James tells us that they are a kind of "moral perception" which deal with the "directly felt fitness between things". Such feelings often "fly in the teeth of all the prepossession of the habit and presumptions of utility". As such they cannot be explained by appealing to social convention, to considerations of utility or pleasure, or as products of an evolutionary process. Certain things just *feel* right. The "nobler thing" just "tastes better". Certain other things just feel *not* right. They give us a sense of "discord" (1891, WB: 143-144).

James calls these intuitions "ideals" (1891, WB: 144). As such, we should consider them to have the properties of ideals which we have already laid out (V.2). The primary difference between brain-born intuitions and other ideals is that they are meant to be *genuinely* novel or "revolutionary". Genuinely revolutionary ideals are given more weight, on James's system:

> [a]ll the higher, more penetrating ideals are revolutionary. They present
> themselves far less in the guise of effects of past experience than in that

>   of probable causes of future experience, factors to which the environment
>   and the lessons it has so far taught us must learn to bend (1891, WB: 144).

This is an example of what we might call James's "revolutionary stance", and which will be examined more carefully in a later section (§3.5). Here, it is sufficient to note that these ideals are "revolutionary" in at least two senses: they are not the result of past experience, habits, or social norms; and they lead us to novel future experiences.

What kinds of cases does James have in mind when discussing these intuitive feelings? He is talking about instances in which we act against what we have been habituated into, what society tells us is right, or what is in our personal interest, on the basis of some moral perception. As an example, James offers us a case in which many millions of people exist happily in a utopia, at the expense of one "lost soul" who leads a life of "lonely torture".[27] According to James, though considerations of utility, social norms, and personal interest might compel us to accept the situation, those who discovered the truth of the "lost soul" would nonetheless reject such a bargain as "hideous" on the basis of a "specific and independent sort of emotion" (1891, WB: 144).[28] But we do not need such hypothetical situations. History is full of social activists, whistle-blowers, and the rare politician who acted against accepted social norms and personal interest on the basis of what they felt to be right.[29]

What are the origin of these intuitions? In "Moral Philosopher", James attributes their origin to contingent "complications" in our "cerebral structure" which "arose with no

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[27] This example is explored by Ursula Le Guin, in her short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1976).

[28] Commentators tend to associate James's talk about these intuitions with Kantian or deontological intuitions. Gale, for instance, thinks that we should think of them as Kantian desires, which are to be measured against other desires in James's essentially utilitarian theory (1999: 35; 2005: 26). I resist thinking of these intuitions in a Kantian or deontological way for three reasons. Firstly, James is quite clear that, at least in certain instances, these intuitions are "revolutionary", in the sense that they reject established rules, habits, and social consensuses. On the understanding that deontology is fundamentally about rule following, no deontological intuition could be revolutionary in James's sense. Secondly, James is quite clear that these intuitions are novel in their first instance. Though, through work and time, these novel ideals might come to be universally recognised, they do not emerge by virtue of universally shared neural or cognitive features. They are the observation of new empirical data, which has previously gone unnoticed. Thirdly, on the understanding that deontology is fundamentally about obligation, James is not going to see these spontaneous intuitions as especially deontological. *Every* demand comes with an obligation to be met, so the obligatoriness of a demand in its immediacy cannot be the grounds of distinguishing these intuitions from other demands and ideals. There might, however, be room to present these spontaneous intuitions as appearing more imperative or urgent than other demands (see §2.3). However, the distinction between truly imperative demands and supererogatory demands will emerge only through the course of moral inquiry.

[29] James's own example of this kind of social activist is Robert Gould Shaw, a case we will explore later (§3.9).

reference to the perception of […] discords and harmonies [in experience]" (1891, WB: 143). He says something similar in his "Notes on Ethics" (1888-9), where he talks about "accidental variation" in our felt responses to things, which cannot be explained by reference to the effects of a physical or cultural environment (1888-9, ML: 183). It might be useful to connect such moral intuitions with "back-door" experiences, explored in the *Principles* (1890). There, James suggested that there were two sources of experience: "front door" experiences, which were caused by our sensory experiences of an object, and are conscious of that object, and "back door" experiences, which are caused by "molecular and hidden" forces, such as accidental genetic variation, the effects of chemicals, or the indirect effects or more direct "front door" experiences, and are *not* conscious of the objects which caused them (1890, PP2: 1223-5). According to James:

> Our higher æsthetic, moral, and intellectual life seems made up of affections of this collateral and incidental [back door] sort, which have entered the mind by the back stairs, as it were, or rather have not entered the mind at all, but got surreptitiously born in the house (1890, PP2: 1225).

Around this time, James was concerned to argue against reductively evolutionary accounts of the mind, in which all our aesthetic and moral ideas were the results of selective evolutionary pressures. It was this that lead James to attribute the origin of novel moral intuitions to "[p]urely inward forces" (1891, WB: 144).[30]

One problem which arises from explaining the origin of novel moral intuitions as resulting from contingent variations in brain structure is that it would appear to reject any possibility of these intuitions having objective reference. As we have seen, James himself would reject such an account, on the basis that it would fail to give meaning to our moral judgements (§1.2). Even within "Moral Philosopher", James seems to reject such an account, by attributing to these same intuitions properties which seem to indicate their capacity refer to non-subjective objects. He calls them moral "perceptions" and refers to them as a kind of "subtle […] moral sensibility" (1891, WB: 144). In an effort

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[30] See Klein (2016: 9-17) for an exploration of James's "back-door" experiences, and their connection to *a priori* judgements. According to Klein, James was concerned to develop an account of *a priori* judgements which were *necessary*, and not derived from experience, whilst being solely naturalistic in origin. It is tempting to think of "brain-born intuitions" as *a priori* ethical judgements in this sense. The problem with doing so is that such naturalised *a priori* judgements (such as geometrical or logical judgements) are held to be immune from experiential refutation (though on the basis of experience we can tell whether they are *applicable* to objective reality) (Klein, 2016: 15-16; see 1890, PP2: 1257-8). James is clear that, though ideals are not confirmed or refuted by *current* experience, that experiential evidence *does* play some part in assessing their validity. He is also clear that there are *perceptual* features of moral judgements which appear to be more of the nature of "front door" experiences (§3.6). James also, as we shall see, holds that every moral situation is unique in a way that renders *a priori* necessary moral judgements to be insufficient when judging a particular situation (VII.2.1). However, I am open to the possibility that some sub-set of moral ideals are *a priori* in this sense.

to avoid the unnecessary reductivism of the term "brain-born" intuitions, I refer to these novel feelings of felt fitness and discord as "spontaneous intuitions".

James treats similar phenomena less reductively in other essays of this period. In "Great Men and Their Environment" (1880), for instance, James once again argues against the reductive evolutionary account he associates with Spencer. Whereas the evolutionist is constrained to see every individual as being caused by selective evolutionary pressures, James's evolutionism seeks a place for individual variation. Certain individuals (the eponymous "Great Men") are not *caused* by their environment, but rather act under novel ideals which *alter* their environment. The variation is a result of the "personal tone of each mind" (1880, WB: 184). The spontaneous intuitions which emerge from the "personal tone" of such "great men" come from a number of sources:

> the new conceptions, emotions, and active tendencies which evolve are originally produced in the shape of random images, fancies, accidental out-births of spontaneous variation in the functional activity of the excessively unstable human brain (1880, WB: 184).[31]

In this essay, James is clear that though the origins of these variations are independent of the physical or cultural environment, that they manifest themselves as an enhanced sensitivity *to* certain features of that environment. The personal tone of an individual mind makes it "more alive to certain classes of experience than others, more attentive to certain impressions, [and] more open to certain reasons" (1880, WB: 186-7). Using the terminology that we have developed so far, we can say that individual variations can make us more sensitive to the significance of certain elements of experience.

Spontaneous intuitions should be considered just as fallible as any other judgement. In "Moral Philosopher", James states that he agrees with the intuitionist (against the evolutionist) as regards the origin of many moral judgments. Insofar as the intuitionists refuse to reduce all our moral (and aesthetic) perceptions and judgements to reductive facts about evolutionary history or utility, then they are correct (1891, WB: 144; 1888-9, ML: 183). However, James also resists several features of intuitionism. In particular, James is concerned to counter the anti-empirical and "dogmatic" temper of most intuitionist ethics (1891, WB: 158; 1888-9, ML: 183). According to James, we have no intuitive moral faculty or sensibility which guarantees us absolute truth in the moral domain. Like any perception, they can be mistaken, or only partially correct, and are subject to revision given more information or better "vantage points". Like any perception, spontaneous intuitions are empirical and subject "to the conditions of ethical discussion" (1888-9, ML: 183).

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[31] See IV.4.4 for an examination of how "fancies" of the imagination can come to be realised within objective reality.

In fact, James is often far less concerned with the *origins* of moral judgements than he is with their *validity*. The evolutionist and the intuitionist, according to James, both make the mistake of conflating these two features. As far as the pragmatist is concerned, our intuitions can be generated by brain structure, imagination, fantasy, special sensitivity, or whatever. Every hypothesis, the "triumphant" and the "absurd" are "on an exact equality in respect of their origin". What really matters, as far as their validity is concerned, is their "fertility". Do such judgments accurately predict future experience, better allow us to navigate our moral landscape, and lead us to a confirmation of their reality? Wherever the hypothesis comes from, it is correct insofar as it receives "the consecration of agreement with outward relations". However the human mind produces ideas, reality "simply confirms or refutes, adopts or rejects, preserves or destroys" these notions. It is in this confirmation of future experience that the validity of any idea or judgement is shown, not in its origin (1880, WB: 184-6).[32]

Nonetheless, we might think that this simple verificationist account is too simple for two reasons. Firstly, there is an important pragmatic difference between an idea which has emerged from random brain chemistry, and one which is the result of a novel sensitivity to some feature of experience. The former *might* prove to have some objective reference, but this would be merely accidental. The latter, as it emerges *from* a relation with reality, is more likely to have that reference, and will be in principle more likely to persuade others, as they too can direct their attention towards that feature of experience. There is thus a difference between a spontaneous variation of cerebral structure which produces a moral judgement, and one which produces a new *sensitivity* to experience. We should hope that the relevant spontaneous intuitions in James's account are of the latter sort.[33]

Secondly, it is rarely the case that we passively generate ideals, and then look to see if the actually existing environment accepts them or rejects them. Often, our ideals are

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[32] James puts this clearly in his "Notes on Ethics" (1888-9):

> *No psychologic fact* as to how an ethical judgment arose can prove (or disprove) its validity, unless combined with the ethical major premise it is good (or bad) to obey a judgment so arising. […] The ultimate question always remains: *Shall* I obey it? *Shall* it bind me? *Shall* I hold it good? (1888-9, ML: 185)

Here James clearly distinguishes between the origin and the validity of an ethical judgement.

[33] R. Putnam (1998) emphasises the perceptual nature of these intuitions by making them analogous to sensations of secondary qualities:

> When James says that a specific emotion makes us feel the hideousness of a certain state of affairs, he is saying something entirely analogous to saying, for example, that a specific sensation makes us feel the blueness of the sky (1998: 6).

In doing so, she implicitly connects James to the contemporary neo-sentimentalism of John McDowell and others. Cf. McDowell (1998).

demonstrably *not* realised in the current environment, but we nonetheless persist in acting so as to *make* the environment accept them. This is especially true of "revolutionary" ideals. Here is James saying just this in the *Principles*:

> although the elements [of aesthetic and ethical systems] are matters of experience, the peculiar forms of relation into which they are woven are incongruent with the order of passively received experience. The world of aesthetics and ethics is an ideal world, a Utopia, a world which the outer relations persist in contradicting, but which we as stubbornly persist in striving to make actual [...]*There are then ideal and inward relations amongst the objects of our thought which can in no intelligible sense whatever be interpreted as reproductions of the order of outer experience.* In the æsthetic and ethical realms they conflict with its order—the early Christian with his kingdom of heaven, and the contemporary anarchist with his abstract dream of justice, will tell you that the existing order must perish, root and branch, ere the true order can come (1890, PP2: 1235).

Ideals, then, do *not* look for confirmation in the *currently existing* order of the world for their validity, though they are responsive to *some* notion of experience. There appears to be a tension between suggesting that we verify our moral hypotheses by testing them against our experience, and that we change our environment so that it coheres with our moral hypothesis. On the one hand, moral discovery takes place. On the other, moral creation. The final chapter of this thesis is dedicated to resolving this tension.[34]

I suggest that we can get clearer on the nature of spontaneous intuitions by linking them with the "fringe" of felt relations (IV.2.2). Both the "fringe" and spontaneous intuitions deal with a feeling of appropriateness or fittingness which is potentially cognitive, but not completely expressible. The reader will recall that "the fringe" is the word which James gave to the "halo" or "aura" of felt relations which accompany each experience. Our field of experience at any given time consists in a centre of attention, and the marginal fringe of felt relations. These relations indicate ways that the current object of attention might relate to a wider environment of objects (such as *next to*, *similar to*, *identical to*, *different from*, etc.), feelings of expectation (relations this object has to future experiences) and continuation (relations this object has to past experiences). The vast

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[34] In fact, James in this section of the *Principles* offers a partial solution. Here he suggests that though original scientific, aesthetic, and ethical hypotheses are not reproductions of an external order, nonetheless they are shown through experiment to be *congruent* with them (or not). James talks about this in terms of "translation", suggesting that the world is conducive to translation into scientific terms, less so into aesthetic terms, and our translation of "nature's materials" into ethical forms takes place discouragingly slowly (1890, PP2: 1235-6). This does not quite solve the whole of the problem, for it still remains ambivalent on whether ethical inquiry is creating an ethical order or discovering one. But it is an indication of where the solution lies.

majority of these relations are not present in our experience as conceptual objects, but only as vague feelings of fit or direction.

These felt relational aspects of our experience demonstrate a kind of proto-normativity. When the object of our attention is corroborated by the fringe of felt relations, we feel that we are "all right". When there is a mismatch between the fringe and the object of our attention, then we feel that something has gone wrong. According to James, these relational feelings have a serious cognitive role to play. One part of this cognitive role is the "leading" account of reference (IV.2.3). I would now like to suggest that the fringe can also help us understand spontaneous moral intuitions about the "felt fitness" of things.

Let us take an example which James offers us of the fringe at work. When we forget the name of some acquaintance, and struggle to remember it, then there is a particularity to the absence in our memory which will not accept just *any* name. Though we cannot recall the precise name, there is some feeling present in our consciousness which rejects unlikely candidates. When we finally recall the name, we recognise it as appropriate, even though moments ago we could not have told you what it was. The gap in our memory is "intensely active". James tells us that there is a "sort of wraith of the name […] in it, beckoning us in a given direction" (1890, PP1: 243). We have the fringe of felt relations here, without the actual term. These felt relations point us in the right direction, and allow us to feel one name as *fitting* and another name as *not fitting* those relations.

Let us look at another example. When we intend to make a statement, we rarely have a definitive word-by-word idea of the sentences which we are going to utter. What we have is a vague feeling of the purport of our expression and a feeling of expectation that what we will actually say will conform to it. This feeling of expectation is what either corroborates or rejects the words which actually come out of our mouths:

> Linger, and the words and things come into the mind, the anticipatory intention, the divination is there no more. But as the words that replace it arrive, it welcomes them successively and calls them right if they agree with it, it rejects them and calls them wrong if they do not. It has therefore a nature of its own of the most positive sort, and yet what can we say about it without using words that belong to the later mental facts that replace it? (1890, PP 1: 245).

This feeling of appropriateness is how we assess whether or not our attempt at expressing ourselves is going rightly or wrongly. Similar to the way in which our understanding of grammatical structure means that "[a]djectives call for nouns, verbs for adverbs, etc.", the relational features of our experience point "call for" certain other experiences, and reject those that do not continue or fit with those relational features (1890, PP 1: 246).

For our purposes, the key point is that the relational features of our everyday experience provide us with non- or pre-conceptual feelings of appropriateness or fittingness. Certain experiences "call for", "beckon" or "welcome" other experiences, and reject or distance themselves from others. These feelings are held to be an irreducible part of cognition for James. They are ways in which we are genuinely aware of some expected future experience. Our feelings of appropriateness or inappropriateness are a (fallible) mark of how our ideas match up with the rest of experience. These cognitive feelings are also obviously normative, in the sense that they indicate that certain things are right (in the sense of being fitting or appropriate) and that certain things are wrong (in the sense of demonstrating a lack of fit or an inappropriateness). And, seeing as these are real relational features of experience, the James of *Radical Empiricism* will also hold that such fittingness relations are (potentially) features of objective reality.

The connection between these proto-normative relational features of experience and spontaneous intuitions seem clear enough. As ideals or demands, spontaneous intuitions *are* relational features of experience. Both deal with the "felt fitness" of some act or object in relation with a wider environment of experience. Spontaneous intuitions "call for" certain types of act and objects, and they reject others as inappropriate. And they are based in vague sensation or feeling, rather than necessarily being fully expressible in conceptual terms.

Connecting spontaneous intuitions with the relational feelings of the fringe allows us to see novel moral intuitions as potentially much more cognitive and objective than James's statements about brain structure indicate. The examples which James uses to articulate the fringe are obvious cases in which there *is* some correct answer, or some right or wrong way of proceeding. The appropriateness of some act, judgement, or object is dependent upon whether they are found to fit with a wider range of experiences now and in the future. Our spontaneous feelings of appropriateness *now* are cognitive if they predict these future experiences accurately. In this way, spontaneous intuitions can be understood as a vague awareness of how some novel object, act, or principle fits in with a wider (ideal or actual) world of experiences, experienced now only as a kind of feeling attributed to the marginal or relational aspects of our experience, which would, if truly cognitive, lead us to a more direct experience of the appropriateness of that object, act, or principle. Seeing as appropriateness is understood by James as a matter some element of experience standing in relation with other experiences, radical empiricism will hold appropriateness to be a potentially objective, discoverable, and public fact. So, spontaneous intuitions are objective in the sense that they are responsive to a wider environment, and in the sense that they potentially cognitive of an objective fact about future experience.[35]

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[35] The nature of this moral sensitivity will be discussed below (§3.3; §3.6).

§2.5 Responsiveness to Reality

I argued in the introduction to this chapter that James needed two elements for his notion of moral inquiry to be objective. This section has dealt with the first element: the need for our various moral perceptions and judgements to be responsive to something outside of our subjective feeling. I have suggested that the application of radical empiricism allows James's account of moral perceptions to *potentially* have this kind of objectivity. I have argued that James's notion of significance can be potentially "coercive over our thought" in the same way that physical objects can (§2.2); our ideals and moral demands can have non-subjective reference (§2.3); and that novel intuitions about the appropriateness of some act can be considered responsive to a wider environment (§2.4).

Before we move on, it will be useful to get a little clearer on what it might mean for our moral judgements to be responsive to a world *external* to our subjective feelings and thoughts. In his essay "The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience" (1905), James explores the notion of "affective facts". These are experiences in which the perception of some object or event is inextricable from a feeling of its value, such as when we perceive a person to be hateful, judge an action to be mean, or feel a situation to be tragic. In their first intention at least, such experiences seem to have these evaluative properties "all in themselves and quite apart from our opinion". Affective facts are neither obviously physical objects, nor obviously reducible to mental states. In fact, James suggests that affective facts represent an ambiguous, and thus purer, state of experience. As yet, we have encountered no "urgent need" to categorise such experiences as either mental or physical (1905, ERE: 72-3).

We saw, in Chapter IV, that James separates objective and subjective reality partially on the basis of how objective items *interact* with each other (IV.4.3). Objective reality can be distinguished by its objects demonstrating their properties "energetically" (1904, ERE: 17). James notes that the evaluative properties of affective facts appear to lack a certain kind of "energetic" nature, in that they do not effect *other* objects. However, James observes that:

> [t]he "interesting" aspects of things are […] not wholly inert physically,
> though they be active only in these small corners of physical nature which
> our bodies occupy. That, however, is enough to save them from being
> classed as absolutely non-objective (1905, ERE: 75).

If affective facts can be shown to reliably effect *us* in a certain way, then this is sufficient for confirming their objective reality.

None of this guarantees that any particular moral judgement or perception has objectivity. Indeed, there is no guarantee that *any* moral judgement has objectivity on this view. It simply shows that moral feelings and experiences are rightly considered *candidates* for being judged to be objective. Ultimately, whether or not our moral judgements *are* objective can only be demonstrated by the results of moral inquiry.

§3. MORAL INQUIRY

This section will focus on delivering the second of the two requirements for an objective account of moral inquiry: an indication that proceeding with inquiry will lead us towards some objective truth, and not to either an arbitrary end point or no end point at all.

When speaking about the procedure of any inquiry, James usually offers a naïve and undeveloped Darwinian assertion that the environment or reality "selects" for the right ideas on a long enough timeline (e.g. 1880, WB: 170). Wrong ideas will not "work", and will result in disappointing or disruptive experiences. We revise our beliefs in light of these frustrating experiences, and try to formulate beliefs which will better stand the test of experience. A true idea is one which would always be found successful, and which experience would consistently continue to confirm (1896, WB: 25).[36]

Already such a model supposes something more than a reality against which we test our ideas. It also requires inquirers who wish to get their beliefs right. According to the model James proposes, in practical matters individuals have strong pragmatic reasons for wanting true beliefs. In these cases, the experiences which indicate that our beliefs are incorrect also disrupt some vital practical project we are engaged in. True beliefs allow us to successfully engage in the environment, to survive, flourish, and better control our situation. But in theoretical, abstract, philosophical or ethical inquiries, our interests are rarely so practical. The experiences which indicate our idea's insufficiency are often difficult to discover or attend to. In these cases, we need inquirers who are interested in getting their beliefs correct for something other than simply pragmatic reasons.[37]

Things become even more difficult when we consider James's clearly expressed pluralism. If it is the case that there are multiple and equally valid claims of the good, then what is it that prevents us from fervently adopting and attempting to actualise

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[36] See I.6.3

[37] This issue is addressed in the next section (§3.1).

whichever good we are partial to, at the expense of all others? We need some reason for the adoption of a principle of tolerance if our inquiry into the good is going to avoid dogmatic assertions that some one good is *the* good.[38]

With the postulation of more than one real good, it also becomes clear that what counts as a possible end of inquiry is complex. In simple scientific or practical inquiries, we are usually looking for a specific answer to a specific question. In such cases, it is clear what would count as a solution, and it is easier to see how the environment would "select" for correct beliefs in such practical cases. However, such a simple solution is not available for James's account of moral inquiry. At best, our experience might be able to tell us if some particular object appears to be significant. But our aim cannot be the discovery of one correct ideal, principle, or good. It must rather be finding a unifying system in which as many ideals as possible can find their satisfaction and exist in mutually supportive relations. This is what James means in "Moral Philosopher" by the philosopher voting and acting to bring about "the largest total universe of good" (1891, WB: 158), and why he tells us in "Reflex Action and Theism" that our only duty is to operate on the world so as to bring about "the richest results that the material given will allow" (1881, WB: 103). It is much harder to apply James's intuitive Darwinian notion of inquiry to such a complex object.

James presents moral inquiry not as an individual inquiry into what *I* feel to be right and good, but a communal inquiry into what we can all *agree* is right and good. The experiences which count as relevant in determining whether reality selects for a belief are not just my own, but also the experiences of others. James appeals to this when he tells us that if we make a "bad mistake" when rejecting some demand and preventing it from being realised, that the "cries of the wounded will soon inform [us] of the fact" (1891, WB: 158). We should understand these cries as coming from people sensitive to some significant feature of experience which is currently being overlooked. [39] But this idea tacitly assumes that there is an audience to that cry who is able to hear it, willing to listen to it, and capable of responding to it correctly.[40] To continue the metaphor of the

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[38] The issue of tolerance will specifically be addressed below (§3.4).

[39] To be clear: we always have to ignore *some* demands, in order to actualise others. We "customarily make light" of some demands without repercussion (1891, WB: 149). These "cries" are marks which indicate that we have ignored a genuinely obligatory demand, one which returns when we reject it (§2.2).

[40] As Suckiel notes in response to this claim of James's:

> [h]is view here appears to be that if those members of society who are being unjustly treated would only make their demands known with sufficient clarity, then social arrangements will be changed to accommodate them. A glimpse of social history, however, shows that there is little reason to expect this to be true. The powerless may complain exceedingly and in great numbers, but this in itself

previous section, the cries which mark the rejection of some significant object or obligatory demand requires a proper "receiver". So, James's model of inquiry also seems to assume people with enough sensitivity and imagination to respond and sympathetically engage with ideals which are different from their own.[41]

A worked out Jamesian position on moral inquiry, then, would be a great deal more complex than James's naïve assertion about reality selecting for the right beliefs suggests. It requires particular kinds of inquirers, with certain epistemic standards, who have certain virtues (such as tolerance), and who are responsive to each other in the requisite ways. In fact, I shall argue in this section that rather than presenting us with a systematic account of the procedures which we need to adopt in order to reach truth in moral inquiry, James is actually offering us something more like a virtue based account of the features which the participants of a potentially objective moral inquiry must possess.

I start by looking at *who* James takes to be the participants of this inquiry (§3.1). Then we move on to two kinds of moral sentiment James provides us with: those inherited from our culture (§3.2), and sentiments of a novel sort (§3.3), as well as looking at the limitations of the first (§3.4), and the importance of the second (§3.5). We look at the types of moral perception and attention that James provides us with (§3.6), an account of how moral conversion can take place (§3.7), and an account of the types of mood or emotions which focus our moral attention (§3.8). Finally, I provide a list of the moral and epistemic virtues James holds to be vital in moral inquiry (§3.9).

§3.1 INQUIRERS AND PHILOSOPHERS

As James presents it in "Moral Philosopher", the task of the philosopher is to find some unified system of goods and obligations which is "true" (1891, WB: 142). We start such an inquiry from the position of having certain beliefs, habits, and concepts about the good which guide us. These beliefs are not arbitrary, but are the inheritance of previous generations' attempt to inquire into the same matter (I.5). As such, we should expect the philosopher's attempt to find a unified system of goods to be made easier with each passing generation. In actual fact, however, James tells us the opposite. He tells us that

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often has been shown to provide little motive for social betterment on behalf of those in control (Suckiel, 1982: 68).

Without an audience, willing and able to listen to claims divergent from their own, no amount of "crying" will produce change.

[41] This issue will be explored in more detail below (§3.7; §3.8).

we are blind to the true difficulty of the task *because* we are born into such an inheritance (1891, WB: 154).

Why do our inherited ideas about how the moral landscape should be ordered blind us to the difficulty of finding a true system of goods? This is because such a social environment "encourages us not to be philosophers but partisans" (1891, WB: 154). The philosopher is seeking not just for unity, but for objectivity. As such, they cannot afford to simply accept these inherited judgements:

> [the philosopher] is confident, and rightly confident, that the simple taking counsel of his own intuitive preferences would be certain to end in a mutilation of the fulness of the truth (1891, WB: 154).

A partisan can only see, feel, and assert one type of good. The philosopher, however, as that person who demands objectivity in our moral dealings, must recognise that there are multiple competing and seemingly equally valid claims about the good. Merely asserting the one that our culture habituates us to is no route to genuine objectivity. Another reason we must avoid being partisans is that any empirical investigation aiming at objectivity has to consider any particular proposition fallible and subject to revision or rejection given the right experience. This rules out the kind of dogmatic assertions of the good which partisanship encourages.[42]

So far, we have seen James separate the figure of the "philosopher" from the figure of the "partisan" in two connected senses. The philosopher makes the demand that we seek moral objectivity, whereas the partisan merely asserts their own limited view of the good. And the philosopher remains somewhat disinterested, not championing any particular ideal as the partisan does, but trying to attain the "fulness of truth".

However, there is a complication in this picture. James is quite clear that it is not "pure philosophers" who perform moral inquiry at all, but the partisans of particular ideals. In "Moral Philosopher", he tells us that it is:

> [t]he anarchists, nihilists, and free-lovers; the free-silverites, socialists, and single-tax men; the free-traders and civil-service reformers; the prohibitionists and anti-vivisectionists; the radical darwinians with their idea of the suppression of the weak – these and all the conservative sentiments of society arrayed against them, are simply deciding through actual experiment by what sort of conduct the maximum amount of good can be gained and kept in this world. These experiments are to be judged, not *a priori*, but by actually finding, after the fact of their making, how much more outcry or how much more appeasement comes about (1891, WB: 157).

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[42] The difference between accepting traditional beliefs and respecting them but treating them as fallible is the difference between common-sensism and critical common-sensism (I.1; I.5).

Such a view follows from much we have already seen. As I argued in the previous chapter, the full significance of any ideal is only felt when it is affirmed and acted under (V.2). Seeing as the pure philosopher is by definition removed from ideals in practice, they are removed from data directly relevant to the assessment of such ideals.

One way of interpreting the picture that James is setting up in "Moral Philosopher" is that James is jettisoning the philosopher from moral inquiry entirely. Perhaps philosophy has some retrospective role in seeing how ideals fit together after the fact. But the *real* process of moral inquiry is enacted by the champions of particular ideals, arguing and acting for their respective positions. The problem with such a picture is that it is ill suited to achieve the ethical *truth* which is James's stated aim. Simply letting people bash their ideals against one another until victors emerge is certainly unlikely to lead us to objective truth. Such a situation would allow the loudest, the most fervent, the most dogmatic and the most intolerant to determine what is right. Perhaps we can make the further claim that the demand for truth in moral matters is exorcised with the philosophers themselves.[43] But then James's talk about *inquiry*, about *experiments*, and his assertions regarding achieving truth would be incongruous.

I suggest a different interpretation. Instead of strictly separating "the philosopher" as a disinterested spectator and "the partisan" as the blind affirmer of one ideal, I suggest that we see these figures as representing two undesirable extremes. Any ordinary person shares the philosopher's demand for truth, as well as an aim towards disinterestedness when dealing with others, whilst also affirming their own ideals. Indeed, James seems to express just this in his "Notes on Ethics" (1888-9), when he tells us that each of us want to hold true ideals (not just be able to *assert* our beliefs as true), and that becoming ethical students involves aiming to discover a true system of good (1888-9, ML: 184; §1.3). In other places, James tells us that holding an hypothesis generates a desire for verification. Hypotheses naturally come with a "fever of desire for verification. I read, write, experiment [and] consult experts" in an attempt to verify my hypothesis (1880, WB: 186). If we are to take James's statements that our ideals and faiths are hypotheses seriously (V.2.3), then we should assume that the ordinary holder of such a hypothetical ideal feels this pull towards verification.

James also frequently asserts that the disinterested philosopher is a myth. A philosopher, though they might (at worst) pretend to be disinterested, or (at best) aim to be, nonetheless have temperamental, personal, and inherited biases towards certain ideals. In "Moral Philosopher" James tells us that the philosopher is always a human in a "natural position", which means that they too are a "militant, fighting free-handed that

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[43] This is the interpretation which Franzese (2008) favours (V.1.3).

the goods to which [they are] sensible may not be submerged and lost from out of life" (1891, WB: 154).

The "philosopher" and the "partisan" are thus extremes or abstractions. The features which James attributes to the philosopher (the demand for objectivity, and the recognition that this requires a certain distance from our own claims about the good) are features which any ideal holder can possess. And the features which James attributes to the partisan (the championing of a particular view of the good) are features which he also attributes to the philosopher *as* an ideal holder. The moral inquirer that James is giving us an account of is somewhere in between these two extremes: someone seeking objectivity through a sympathetic engagement with a variety of ideals, including their own, whilst maintaining a certain degree of fallibility and open-mindedness.

It is worth mentioning that this appears to require that ordinary people hold an apparently peculiar stance towards their own ideals. James is suggesting that we must treat our ideals as hypotheses, albeit significant ones. This places him in direct disagreement with Peirce, who suggested that the failure of individuals to hold their inherited moral sentiments as infallible would result in serious moral problems (II.3). James sees individuals as having the sensitivity required to be responsive to their own ideals and others', as well as the capacity to hold those ideals as susceptible to change over time, partially in response to the criticisms, challenges, or insights of people with different ideals. Indeed, according to James's account of significance, such engaged individuals are the *only* people capable of accessing the kinds of experiences which are the material for such a moral inquiry.[44]

§3.2 MORAL SENTIMENTS: COMMON-SENSE

There are two senses in which James appeals to phenomena which look like moral sentiments. The first corresponds to what I call James's "conservative stance". Here James agrees with Peirce: we have certain moral sentiments, which direct and guide our actions, which we have inherited from our ancestors, and which we should be cautious about tampering with.[45] The second sense concerns what I call James's "revolutionary stance". Here James suggests that we have potentially prophetic but fallible intuitions about the rightness or wrongness of certain actions, institutions, or established habits (§2.4). If common-sense moral beliefs are to be considered a body of successful

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[44] We might worry that holding our ideals to be fallible hypotheses means that they will fail to motivate us in the right way. I respond to this worry in §3.9.
[45] See I.5; II.3.

hypotheses, then spontaneous intuitions are novel hypotheses which have not yet been shown to be successful. This section will examine the first sense of moral sentiments, and the next will examine the second.

As we have seen, being a pragmat(ic)ist is linked to holding a certain respect for common-sense beliefs (see I.5). A pragmaticist view of ethics will be no different. James is explicit that our inherited, common-sense beliefs are useful, and should be respected. These various beliefs perform a guiding or "steering function", in the sense that they allow us to navigate through our reality swiftly and reliably (1907, P: 88-90; 1909, PU: 110-111). They are developed and grow through empirical experimentation. They started life as the discoveries or the hypotheses of "prehistoric geniuses", and subsequently proved successful when they were "verified by the immediate facts of experience". Over time, such successful ideas are adopted by humanity as a whole, and become a foundational part of our thoughts on that matter, so that we become "incapable of thinking naturally in any other terms" (1907, P: 90). These common-sense beliefs, then, should be seen as a "collection of extraordinarily successful hypotheses", which are produced, like any hypotheses, in a particular context, and shown to be valid, like any hypotheses, by being verified by subsequent experience (1907, P: 94). Considering the status of our common-sense ideas, then, we naturally and rightly try to maintain as many of them as we can when faced with new data and hypotheses.

We can see James's common-sensism at work in "Moral Philosopher". There James tells us that we are born into a culture which already has a vast store of moral concepts and beliefs, and that we should think of these are the results of an "experiment of the most searching kind". As such, when some conflict of ideals threatens the established order, the philosopher should be by default "conservative" and must "put the things most in accordance with the customs of the community on top" (1891, WB: 156). This would be mere biased preference for some communities' way of doing things were it not for the epistemic component of these beliefs. Our current moral beliefs represent the latest and most stable result of an ongoing moral inquiry. And it is for *this* reason that we should be relatively conservative resist their rejection.

How do our inherited moral beliefs allow us to navigate the moral landscape more swiftly? James indicates one possible answer in "The Sentiment of Rationality" (1882):

> Inasmuch then as custom acquaints us with all the relations of a thing, it teaches us to pass fluently from that thing to others, and *pro tanto* tinges it with the rational character (1882, WB: 67).

In this paper, James is concerned to explore our subjective sense of rationality. He defines this subjective sense in terms of the fluidity of thought (1882, WB: 58). If we are able to continue acting or thinking according to our selected purpose, then those things which continue, which confirm, or at least do not disrupt our thinking or acting appear

(subjectively) as rational. Custom is one way that things can attain this sense of rationality. Customary, inherited ideas familiarise us with certain aspects of objects, and with some of the relations those objects have with other things. With our understanding of these objects and their relations, we can have fairly reliable expectations of our future experiences with them within certain contexts. Our thoughts and dealings with these objects, and the objects relationally connected with them, can continue without being interrupted or challenged. We pass from one experience to another without a sense of disruption to the "fluency" of our thought. As such, custom and inherited beliefs can lead us to feeling that some object or act is rational, in the sense of fitting with a wider world of meaning and understanding.[46]

Our customary moral ideas perform in the same way. Faced with the "chaos of obligation", they allow us to instinctively attend to the important aspects of a situation, and ignore those demands which are irrelevant. They allow us to hierarchise various competing claims about the good in a way that our peers will recognise and not challenge. And they let us know which obligations, if ignored, will plague us with regret. In short, just like other common-sense beliefs, they allow us to predict future experience, give us a sense of how things relate to one another, and allow us to act without fear of interruption. They therefore present themselves as rational.

This "conservative stance" of James's is, so far, very similar to that presented by Peirce in his 1898 lectures (II.3). However, as useful as such beliefs are, James is also aware of their limitations and dangers. Our unthinking familiarity with something, and our subjective sense of rationality, can blind us to potential or actual problems, to new ideas which might challenge our sense of rationality but be superior in the long run, or to a recognition that the circumstances or context of some object or claim has changed. We will return to this negative side of common-sense in a later section (§3.4).

§3.3 Moral Sentiments: Novelty and Sensitivity

In "The Sentiment of Rationality", custom is contrasted with *novelty*. Whereas custom is connected with familiarity, and a feeling of rationality, novelty is one potential source of interruption of the fluency of thought. Encountering something new gives us the sense that:

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[46] Rationality is defined by James in very subjective terms in this paper. He does not say that rationality *consists* of subjective feeling, but he does indicate that subjective feelings of fluency are the *marks* by which we come to see something as rational.

> we do not know what will come next; and novelty *per se* become a mental
> irritant, while custom *per se* is a mental sedative, merely because the one
> baffles whilst the other settles our expectations (1882, WB: 67).

James is not at this stage stating that either custom or novelty is necessarily good or bad. But from a subjective stand-point, the novel represents a rupture in our sense of fluency, familiarity, and rationality. Such a disruption might be caused by some experience which does not conform to our previously held beliefs, or encountering some new perspective, ideal, or felt significance that our current beliefs do not allow for. The disruption of our habit of thought and action in this way is not always negative in the long run, but it is often unpleasant in the immediate situation. We thus have a very natural and instinctive resistance to the new. Novelty is an irritant, and custom is an anaesthetic.

This understanding of novelty and custom helps us to understand the "revolutionary stance" James adopts in some passages. This stance is expressed best in James's claim that "the highest ethical life" consists in "the breaking of the rules which have grown too narrow for the actual case" (1891, WB: 158). James is telling us that though our inherited moral beliefs and sentiments represent the standard habits and rules by which we engage with our moral lives, the highest ethical life consists in breaking out of these habits when some novel ideal, demand, or experience shows them to be too narrow. Seeing as they are always felt as a disruption to the fluency of our thought, such novel experiences are usually felt to be irrational (by customary standards), or at least unpleasant in the first instance. Attending to the novel elements of experience will be the definition of attending to a "difficult object" in the way we explored in the previous chapter (V.6). When James tells us in the *Principles* that the only ethical act is attending to a difficult experience, and in "Moral Philosopher" that the highest ethical life is breaking habits which have grown too narrow, James is in effect saying the same thing. A novel experience is a difficult object. Attending to this object, considering what experiences we might expect if it is true, and considering the relations it has with what we previously found to be significant, takes courage, imagination, and effort. And affirming that object in the full sense of acting to bring it about will disrupt our old, comfortable, habits of thought and action.[47]

We can understand the novelty of new ideals in a subjective sense and in a more objective sense. In a subjective sense, it is part of the definition of *any* ideal that it is felt to be novel by the person who holds it (1898, TT: 163; V.2.2). Take an example. There is no sense in which "being a good parent" is a novel ideal from the perspective of humanity as a whole. Nonetheless, when properly adopted by a particular person, it is

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[47] One way of understanding "spontaneous intuitions" (§2.4) is a sensitivity to the significance of some novel element of experience, such that attending to it is easier. It will still be "difficult" in the sense of disrupting our other beliefs, and the customary beliefs and behaviours of our culture.

novel for them. Adopting this novel ideal might change what that person feels to be significant, motivate them to change themselves, encourage them to engage with society and the world around them in a new way, and require a radical change in their habitual thoughts and behaviours. It forms, in short, a disruption to their customary habits, and a new and enlivening centre of attention around which new relations can be found and formed.

An ideal can also be novel in a more objective sense. There are ideals which require the change of more than our own habits if they are to be realised. They present themselves as disrupting and challenging the practices and institutions of a wider society, and the habits of a wider community. James points to "Great Men" as people who alter the course of history by perceiving and affirming some novel ideal (see §3.5, below). Of course, novelty in this sense does not always mean progress. There are many ways to be novel, and not all of them will point in the direction of some improvement. This is probably why James suggests that we should be on the side of conservativism by default. New ideals are a risk, in the sense that they have not yet shown themselves to be verifiable goods. However, when such novel ideals present a reasonable challenge to conventional habits, attending to and acting on these ideals represents, for James, the highest ethical life.

In introducing the possibility of individual variation, novel hypotheses, and the perception of new kinds of significance, James is creating a space for something not solely conditioned by the rest of the (cultural or cosmic) universe to emerge. This is precisely the realism about possibility or chance which the Absolute idealists and the deterministic materialists deny. James's pluralism and indeterminism creates the possibility of change, and amelioration over time, through human action.

§3.4 Moral Blindness

The key to understanding the negative aspects of our inherited moral beliefs and concepts is the notion of attention, which we focused on in the previous chapter (V). Our inherited common-sense beliefs and concepts are habits of attention which allow us to act efficiently and without too much reflection. But these habits of attention do not just direct our attention *towards* some feature of experience, but *away* from some other features. Often these ignored aspects are those which are irrelevant to whatever purpose formed the original beliefs or concepts. Other times they are aspects which previous inquirers have found useless or unrevealing. Or perhaps they are simply unconnected to our personal interests. In these ways, our attention can habitually be drawn away

from certain features of experience. As a result, we can become anaesthetised to feeling the significance of features of experience which we do not customarily attend to, or which do not directly interest us. "The very best of men", James tells us "must not only be insensible, but be ludicrously and peculiarly insensible, to many goods" (1891, WB: 154).

The most obvious place James deals with the negative side of our moral inheritance is in *Talks to Teachers* (1899), in particular in "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" and its follow up, "What Makes a Life Significant?".[48] Here is James emphasising this negative aspect:

> [w]e have unquestionably a great cloud-bank of ancestral blindness weighing down upon us, only transiently riven here and there by fitful revelations of the truth [...] Cannot we escape some of those hideous ancestral intolerances and cruelties and positive reversals of the truth? (1899, TT: 151).

Our inherited moral beliefs, concepts, and sentiments, can help us navigate a moral landscape which would otherwise be a bewildering chaos of demands and obligations. But they can also blind us to demands which our ancestors ignored, belittled, or were insensible to. In particular, the interests and demands of those groups of people who have not played a dominant role in the moral discourse and inquiry of our race up to now, those people and groups who were habitually ignored as insignificant to, or incapable of, such an inquiry, or those creatures who did not have voices or a platform to speak, were customarily overlooked. Over time, our customary centres of attention are solidified in directions away from these overlooked areas, so that even when these demands are allowed voice, they are too far removed from our habitual centres of attention and interest to move us. Such "ancestral blindness" is not only damaging to those whose demands go customarily unacknowledged, but it is also detrimental to anybody aiming at objectivity in ethics, as it blinds us to the "fullness of the truth".[49]

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[48] I have already drawn extensively from these essays when discussing the "realisation obligation" (V.7.3). James also discusses how the limitations of our powers of imagination and sympathy result in "an insensibility to the inner significance of alien lives" in his essay "Human Immortality" (1898, ERM: 98-101).

[49] James's concern about this ancestral blindness is one of the reasons he rejects a reliance on institutions and social norms. According to James

> [t]he bigger the unit you deal with, the hollower, the more brutal, the more mendacious is the life displayed [...] I am against all big organisations as such, national ones first and foremost [...] and in favour of the eternal forces of truth which always work in the individual and immediately unsuccessful way (Letter to Sarah Wyman Whitman, 1899, CWJ 8:546).

Similarly, in a letter to William Mackintire Salter in the same year, James claims that

Though our inherited blindness to certain demands is epistemically and morally problematic, an awareness of this blindness can lead us to certain positive conclusions about moral inquiry. We can see this in two passages in which he reviews the position he takes in "On a Certain Blindness". Reviewing his position in the preface to *Talks to Teachers*, James says the following:

> It is more than the mere piece of sentimentalism which it may seem to some readers. It connects itself with a definite view of the world and of our moral relations to the same. Those who have done me the honor of reading my volume of philosophic essays will recognize that I mean the pluralistic or individualistic philosophy. According to that philosophy, the truth is too great for any one actual mind, even though that mind be dubbed "The Absolute," to know the whole of it. The facts and worths of life need many cognizers to take them in. There is no point of view absolutely public and universal. […] The practical consequence of such a philosophy is the well-known democratic respect for the sacredness of individuality – is, at any rate, the outward tolerance of whatever is not itself intolerant (1899, TT: 4)

Again, in his review of "A Certain Blindness" in "What Makes a Life Significant?", James says the following:

> I tried to make you feel how soaked and shot-though life is with values and meanings which we fail to realize because of our external and insensible point of view [...] There lies more than a mere interest of curious speculation in understanding this. It has the most tremendous practical importance. I wish that I could convince you of it as I feel it myself. It is the basis of all our tolerance, social, religious, and political. [...] No one has insight into all the ideals. No one should presume to judge them off-hand. The pretension to dogmatise about them in each other is the root of most human injustices and cruelties (1899, TT: 150).

In both passages, James is connecting the recognition of our moral blindness with the democratic principle of tolerance. And he does so both through the epistemic claim that no one person can have access to all the relevant facts about our moral landscape, and the practical claim that dogmatism leads to injustice. The argument goes something like this: We, as moral inquirers, want to know the objective truth regarding our ideals. Knowing ideals involves being sensible to some aspect of experience. Being sensible to

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> we "intellectuels" in American must all work to keep our precious birthright of individualism, and freedom from these institutions. *Every* great institution is perforce a means of corruption – whatever good it may also do. Only in the free personal relation is full ideality to be found (1899, CWJ9: 41).

Institutions can stabilise and solidify the general habits, principles, and rules which may blind us to certain features of particular moral situations (See §3.5; VII.2.1).

some aspect of experience involves attending to it in a certain way. Attending to some aspect of experience involves *not* attending to others. As such, we are constrained to be inattentive and insensible to some large range of experience. Others who attend to aspects of experience which we do not have access to facts that we do not, in the same way that we have access to facts which they do not. No one person has access to all the facts. Therefore, we should (considering our demand for objectivity) be tolerant and attentive to the claims of other people who are in an identical epistemic position to ourselves. Ignoring the demands of others is not only epistemically irresponsible, but also can be responsible for those people's demands not being met. Every demand has an obligation to be met. Refusing to meet this obligation for no reason other than bias in unjust. Therefore, we should (considering our demand for justice) be as tolerant as possible of other people's ways of life.[50]

From a negative point regarding the limitations of our own moral perspective, then, James attempts to move us to a recognition of the epistemic and practical importance of the democratic virtue of tolerance.[51]

§3.5 THE REVOLUTIONARY STANCE

The negative aspect of our moral inheritance, and its connection with tolerance, leads us to two different ways of interpreting James's "revolutionary stance". We can read his claim about the importance of recognising novel ideals in both an epistemic and a moral way. James himself does not set his position out in this manner. In most places, he is (perhaps deliberately) ambiguous between epistemic and moral readings. The two

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[50] To my knowledge, the only other Jamesian ethicist to have explored both the advantageous and the detrimental effects that habits or established ideas can have on our moral lives is Marchetti (2015b). Marchetti calls this the "double soul of habit" (2015a: 102). However, Marchetti's somewhat mysterious attempt to overcome this tension is by suggesting that "personal growth and collective flourishing are in fact dependent on habitual dishabituation" (2015b: 110). If James *did* hold such a position, it would present a tension with his wider common-sensism, as it would suggest that our moral duty consisted in challenging habits which were perfectly functional (I.5). My suggestion is simply that reflecting the limitations of our habits of attention gives us a reason for adopting fallibilism. This fallibilism *should* be held towards our habitual beliefs, but they should only be "dishabituated" if we have sufficient reason for doubting them.

[51] In this way, James can answer Talisse and Aikin's criticism that James has to look *outside* of "the existing economy of desires and demands" to provide a notion of tolerance, which contravenes his own prescription against demand-independent rules and norms (2011: 9). In fact, James's substantive notion of toleration emerges from *within* this economy, both through our search for the validity of our moral claims, and through the recognition of our own limitations.

readings are mutually supportive, but separating them will allow us to see James's position more clearly.

Epistemologically speaking, moral inquiry is held by James to be structurally analogous to scientific inquiry (§1.4). We recognise our ideals as hypotheses, and we recognise that any apparent stability we have reached in our moral inquiry may well prove to be temporary (1891, WB: 156). Like any inquiry, new data, new ideas, and the promise of greater simplification or unification encourages us to attempt new hypotheses. James indicates this when he tells us that

> although a man always risks much when he breaks away from the established rules and strives to realise a larger ideal whole than they permit, yet the philosopher must allow that it is at all times open to anyone to make the experiment, provided he fear not to stake his life and character upon the throw (1891, WB: 156).

Here James is legitimising breaking away from customary habits on epistemic grounds. We gain access to the data regarding some ideal's significance by living according to it. In that person's experience, and in their interactions with others, we gain access to the evidence concerning its validity. But living according to genuinely new hypotheses is a risky business. Doing so risks not only error in the standard epistemic sense, but also involves the existential risk of either living life according to a substandard, incorrect, problematic, or meaningless ideal, or living life according to an ideal that others refuse to acknowledge or realise. Nonetheless, without people willing to "stake [their] life and character upon the throw" in this way, we would not have access to new data in our moral inquiry.[52]

Further, to indicate the truth of any hypotheses that we currently hold, we must test it against a range of experiences and criticisms. It is not enough that some hypothesis works in *our* experience. We must try it against a variety of experiences, from different perspectives. In this sense, allowing our conventional opinions to be challenged from novel perspectives gives us access to evidence regarding the truth or falsity of those opinions. This is consistent with Peirce's fifth character of *critical* common-sensism (I.5).

James's position of the legitimacy of novel ideals marks another major difference between him and Peirce. Peirce thought that ethical inquiry was a theoretical affair, and that it should not be allowed to impact on practical life until its results demonstrated

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[52] It is worth noting that James uses the language of "risk" here, in exactly the same way as he does in "The Will to Believe" (1896). In will-to-believe cases, we are allowed to believe in some proposition which is live to us provided we accept it as a hypothesis, not as a definitive fact, and provided that by doing so it is possible that we come into contact with the evidence which will prove or disprove that hypothesis. Again, our breaking away from conventional beliefs, or from what can readily be proved given our current evidence, is defended on the basis of the possibility of uncovering some new truth. We return to will-to-believe cases in the final chapter (VII.1.4).

stability (II.3). James, on the other hand, holds that an important feature of moral inquiry takes place when people live under untested and unproven ideals, examining their experience and interacting with others. Though risky, this is legitimated by James not just in the standard liberal sense that everyone should be free to pursue their own sense of significance, but in the epistemic sense that this is the only way to attain moral truth in the long run.

Morally speaking, James can defend his revolutionary stance on the basis of his thesis that the satisfaction of every demand constitutes some good, and carries an obligation to be realised. This means that not just conventionally recognised goods, but also novel demands, carry an obligation to be realised. If we are to argue that it should *not* be realised, we must appeal not to some external standard, but to some other conventional good which could not be realised as a result of the novel demand being met (1891, WB: 149). As long as no conventional good is threatened by the satisfaction of the novel demand, then we have an obligation to meet it. However, when novel and conventional goods *do* conflict, James's default choice will be with the conventional good, simply because this is the one which has been *proved* to be satisfactory.

Of course, there might be all kinds of reasons why, in a given situation, we might choose to reject some established good in favour of a novel demand. As we have seen, our current ways of organising the moral landscape, the concepts, habits, rules, and institutions which we have in place, can result in groups of demands being ignored. James was acutely aware that his own political and institutional situation was far from perfect:

> [s]ee the abuses which the institution of private property covers, so that even to-day it is shamelessly asserted among us that one of the prime functions of the national government is to help the adroiter citizens grow rich. See the unnamed and unnameable sorrows which the tyranny [...] of the marriage institution brings to so many, both married and unwed (1891, WB: 156).[53]

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[53] James is frequently criticised for (unlike Dewey) ignoring the social and institutional problems of his day when presenting his ethics (Otto, 1943; Garrison and Madden, 1977; Campbell, 1981). Nonetheless, James did frequently express his dissatisfaction with the capitalistic system. For instance:

> [s]ociety has [...] undoubtedly got to pass towards some newer and better equilibrium, and the distribution of wealth has doubtless slowly got to change (1899, TT: 166).

If I am correct about the importance of the "revolutionary stance", to James's philosophy, then, contrary to the view that his "moral thought largely undercut the possibility of social reconstruction" (Campbell, 1981: 234), James in fact saw courageously acting against "enthroned abuse[s]", as well as norms and institutions which were restrictive, as the highest ethical life. See

Demands that are "novel" in the sense of not being met by our current system can be habitually ignored as the result of prejudice, and attending to them can help bring this bias to light. Sympathetically engaging with novel ideals can bring us to see the limitations and injustices of our conventional moral beliefs.[54]

§3.6 MORAL PERCEPTION

Throughout this examination of James's moral theory, we have seen James talk consistently in perceptual or sensational terms. I argued in the previous chapter that ideals and demands were best understood in terms of attention (V). When addressing spontaneous intuitions, we saw James refer to them as "perceptions" about the felt fitness of certain objects and acts, or a "sensitivity" to certain features of experience (§2.4). And when talking about our incapacity to appreciate another person's claims about the good, James talks about "moral blindness" (§3.4). Moral life, according to James, is about being sensitive to and attending to the right kinds of experiences.

Myers (1986: 424-445) for an excellent overview of James's many social activities and projects. See §3.9.

[54] We might think that James's "revolutionary stance" is in direct contradiction with this more conservative assertion that we privilege the conventional when it clashes with the novel. But James is quite clear that there are often occasions when our previous beliefs and habits are shown to be incorrect by new kinds of experience:

> I have been accused, when talking of the subject of habit, of making old habits appear so strong that the acquiring of new ones, and particularly anything like a sudden reform or conversion, would be made impossible by my doctrine. Of course, this would suffice to condemn the latter; for sudden conversions, however infrequent they may be, unquestionably do occur. But there is no incompatibility between the general laws [of habit] I have laid down and the most startling sudden alterations in the way of character. New habits can be launched, I have expressly said, on condition of there being new stimuli and new excitements. Now life abounds in these, and sometimes they are such critical and revolutionary experiences that they change a man's whole scale of values and system of ideas. In such cases, the old order of his habits will be ruptured; and if the new motives are lasting, new habits will be formed, and build up in him a new or regenerate "nature" (1899, TT: 53).

James's point then, appears to be is that we should privilege conventionally held goods at the expense of novel goods when: a) the novel good cannot be realised alongside the conventional good; or b) the conventional is not challenged or shown to be insufficient by the novel experience. We'll return later (§3.7) to cases of sudden moral conversion.

Though we might pretend, as philosophers, that we produce our ideas through dispassionate reason and logical analysis, according to James what we usually do is take a stand "on a sort of dumb conviction that the truth must lie in one direction rather than another" (1882, WB: 78). This too, James attributes to a kind of sensitivity to a certain kind of evidence or experience. Our sense that one line of inquiry is more likely than another to achieve truth are based on these dumb convictions. Later, we try to articulate our dumb convictions to others and to ourselves, and evaluate them in light of the evidence which we have gathered. James defends the legitimacy of acting from such inchoate sensitivity or dumb conviction, again on epistemic grounds:

> [i]n short, if I am born with such a superior general reaction to evidence that I can guess right and act accordingly, and gain all that comes of right action […] by what law shall I be forbidden to reap the advantages of my superior native sensitiveness? Of course I yield to my belief in such a case as this or distrust it, alike at my peril, just as I do in any of the great practical decisions of life. If my inborn faculties are good, I am a prophet; if poor, I am a failure: nature spews me out of her mouth, and there is an end of me. In the total game of life we stake our persons all the while (1882, WB: 78).

In the *Principles*, James connects this faculty for correctly guessing the direction of truth with correctly selecting the right elements of experience to attend to: "the man of genius is he who will always stick in his bill at the right point [of experience], and bring it out with the right element" (1890, PP 1: 276; 1892, BC: 157). Our sensibilities, then, might give us a better sense of the direction of truth, might allow us to generate good hypotheses, or might lead us to attend to the right elements of experience. The validity is, of course, still tied by James to being confirmed by experience in the long run.

In the ethical sphere, we can see James appeal to at least two types of morally relevant sensitivity. This first sort concerns being sensitive to some new object of significance, or aware of some new relation that a conventionally recognised good can enter into. We can call this kind of sensitivity "ethical generation". The second type of sensitivity concerns being aware of a wider array of significance, and a wider field of relations between objects of significance. Let's call this "ethical breadth". Ethical generation concerns a sensitivity to some novel object or the generation of some plausible novel hypothesis. Spontaneous intuitions are of this class (§2.4). We've already looked at James's stance on these in the last few sections (§2.4; 3.3; 3.5). Here I shall focus on the second kind of ethical sensitivity.

Each of us are sensitive to the significance of some class of objects, or some range of experience, and insensitive to a much larger range. But there is significant individual variation concerning the breadth of this range. This is as true in moral perception as it is in visual perception. Certain people can attend to a wider array of objects at the same

time, or are aware of a wider range of the relations of the objects they attend to.[55] Seeing as love has been connected to an intimate kind of attention, James's statements that certain people have a greater capacity for love or friendship can be read in a similar light (1899, TT: 151; V.7.3). As well as personal differences, environmental factors can widen or limit the range of our concern. "[D]rowsiness, illness, or fatigue," for instance, can result in our fields of attention narrowing, and "we find ourselves correspondingly oppressed and contracted" (1902, VRE: 189).[56] Certain training or education can extend our natural range or "threshold" of sensitivity. This is one of the reasons that James suggests that ethics should ally itself more with literature than with logic (1891, WB: 159). Literature can help broaden our fields of ethical vision, by sympathetically and dynamically presenting other people's lived worlds and ideals.

One of the major factors which limits ethical breadth is practical concern. James points to novelists, poets, philosophers, dreamers and lovers as the kind of people who are sufficiently removed from practical concern to enable them to sympathetically attend to a wider range of significance. According to James:

> so blind and dead does the clamor of our own practical interests make us to all other things, that it seems almost as if it were necessary to become worthless as a practical being, if one is to hope to attain any breadth of insight into the impersonal world of worths as such, to have any perception of life's meaning on a large, objective scale (1899, TT: 141).

Wordsworth and Whitman are instances of people who are "worthless [and] unproductive" in any conventional practical sense, but who achieve a great breadth of moral vision. "To be rapt with satisfied attention, like Whitman", James tells us, "to the mere spectacle of the world's presence is one way, and the most fundamental way, of confessing one's sense of its unfathomable significance and importance" (1899, TT: 144). Removed from practical concerns, such visionaries achieve an understanding of a much wider range of significance.

Such artistic or philosophical geniuses do not conceptualise or logically analyse the world in order to achieve this broader perception of the significance of things. Such perception is primarily intuitive, and only retrospectively susceptible to analysis. The reason for this, on James's picture, is that conceptualisation and logical reason can only

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[55] E.g. "[s]ome persons have a naturally very wide, others a very narrow, field of consciousness" (1910, EPh: 158)

[56] As James puts it in the *Principles*:

> When very fresh, our minds carry an immense horizon with them. The present image shoots its perspective far before it, irradiating in advance the regions in which lie the thoughts yet unborn. Under ordinary conditions the halo of felt relations is much more circumscribed. And in states of extreme brain-fag the horizon is narrowed almost to the passing word (1890, PP1: 247).

achieve static meaning. The artistic genius, on the other hand, has the ability to sense the dynamic reality of a wider range of objects and their relations. This means that the significance is *felt* more than *known*, in the first instance.

One of the better explanations of this thought is given by James in the *Principles*:

> An often-quoted writer has said that Shakespeare possessed more *intellectual power* than any one else that ever lived. If by this he meant the power to pass from given premises to right or congruous conclusions, it is no doubt true. The abrupt transitions in Shakespeare's thought astonish the reader by their unexpectedness no less than they delight him by their fitness. […] Shakespeare himself could very likely not say why; for his invention, though rational, was not ratiocinative. […] The dry critic who comes after can, however, point out the subtle bonds of identity that guided Shakespeare's pen […] But Shakespeare, whose mind supplied these means, could probably not have told why they were so effective (1890, PP 2: 985-6).

Shakespeare clearly represents an example of someone who has an excellent intuitive feeling regarding the significance of a wide range of life's objects. Without denying that Shakespeare was *aware* of the various novel and fertile links he drew between various objects (it was a "rational" process), James is denying that he was *conceptually* or *intellectually* aware of these links (it was not a "ratiocinative" process). Shakespeare had a good intuition for the direction of truth ("the power to pass from given premises to right conclusions"), and a good breadth of perception regarding the relations between various objects, so that though his "abrupt transitions" appear novel to his audience, they nonetheless surprise us with their fittingness. But Shakespeare could not have, according to James, sat down and dryly walked us through these various connections, relations, conclusions and meanings (though some later critic might). His was a genius of *sensitivity*, not of intellect.

Though intuitive geniuses have a habitually broader range of "vision" of the significance of life, each of us can experience wider and more narrow view-points. James tells us that each of us will experience a few moments of a great "widening of vision", and that we tend to associate such experiences with an "increase of religious insight into life" (1899, TT: 156). By "religious" here, James just means that we tend to treat such experiences as if they are more important, more significant, or more expressive of the meaning of our lives. This broadening of our sympathy, and the increased capacity to take joy in the "importance of our common life", is what James calls "a religious inspiration and an element of spiritual health" (1899, TT: 164).[57]

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[57] James connects this notion of religious and moral perception to his colleague Josiah Royce, and his 1885 book *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*:

Returning to this idea in *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), James clearly connects an increased breadth of vision with an increased awareness of relations:

> Usually when we have a wide field we rejoice, for we then see masses of truth together, and often get glimpses of relations which we divine rather than see, for they shoot beyond the field into still remoter regions of objectivity, regions which we seem rather to be about to perceive than to perceive actually (1902, VRE: 189).

James is explicitly connecting an increased range of moral vision with an increased awareness of the fringe of relations which usually occupies the margins of our experience (IV.2.2). The centre of our attention is ringed with that centre's actual or possible relations to other experiences. Broadening the field means bringing more of the "fringe", or the marginal aspects of our experience, into the centre of attention. James is explicit that such a breadth of vision is more "true" in the sense that we "see" more of reality, and get a sense of the relations that various objects exist in. But such a vision of the dynamic meaning of the world is incapable of being expressed in logical or conceptual language. Nonetheless, when returning to our regular, practical modes of consciousness, we may be able to retain some element of this experience - perhaps some "dumb conviction" about the direction of truth.[58]

To the modern reader, it might seem as if James is attempting to mystify certain moral experiences, by linking them with a sense of religious importance and claiming that an accurate expression of them is impossible. In fact, what James's is aiming for is closer to the opposite. James is seeking to explain reports of mystical experiences in non-mystical terms. Rather than examples of us attaining insight into some unknown realm of

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> Thou has made of [your neighbour] a thing, no Self at all. Have done with this illusion and simply try to know the truth. Pain is pain, joy is joy, everywhere even as in thee […] if thou hast *known* that, thou hast begun to know thy duty (Royce, quoted by James 1899, TT: 138).

Royce is describing in this passage how sympathetic engagement with our neighbour's life and feeling allows us to move past the "illusion" that they are somehow less worthy of concern than us, and towards the "truth" of the duties that we owe to our fellow man. This seems very close to what we have seen expressed by James in *Talks to Teachers* regarding what I have called "the realisation obligation" (V.7.3).

[58] "On a Certain Blindness" contains a description of James's own experience of this kind:

> [a]s I awoke to all this unidealized heroic life around me, the scales seemed to fall from my eyes; and a wave of sympathy greater than anything I had ever before felt with the common life of common men began to fill my soul [...] there I rested on that day, with a sense of widening of vision, and with what it is fair to call an increase of religious insight into life (1899, TT: 155-6).

These cases of "widening vision" might also be connected to moral conversion, which we will look at in the next section (§3.7).

meaning, James explains these mystical experiences as an increased breadth of our normal experience. When our field of attention broadens in this way, we get a glimpse (though fleeting and vague) of a range of significance far greater than that which our own practical and personal interests limit us to. There is a "depth" in these moments, which "constrain us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences" (James, quoting Emerson, 1890, PP 2: 935; V.4). And there is a "truth" and "objectivity" to such moments also, though rarely concretely expressible (1902, VRE: 189). Mystical experiences such as these are like "windows through which the mind looks out upon a more extensive and inclusive world" (1902, VRE: 339). According to the radical empirical thesis laid out in this and previous chapters, we are constrained to attribute more reality to them precisely because they *are* experiences of a wider reality. As a wider view of relations and significances which are potentially objective, such experiences can be of great help in moral inquiry. Of course, any insights we *do* gain from such experiences "must be sifted and tested, and [must] run the gauntlet of confrontation with the total context of experience" (1902, VRE: 338).[59]

It is in one of his latest, and frequently overlooked, essays, that James expresses this position almost explicitly. In "A Suggestion about Mysticism" (1910), James hypotheses that:

> states of mystical intuition may be only very sudden and great extensions
> of the ordinary "field of consciousness" [...] consist[ing] in an immense
> spreading of the margin of the field, so that knowledge ordinarily
> transmarginal would become included, and the ordinary margin would
> grow more central (1910, EPh: 157).

Such experiences, according to James, result from the lowering of our "threshold" of attention, so that we become aware of many things which were previously subconscious ("transmarginal"). Our increased awareness includes sensations, felt emotions, memories, and especially relations which previously existed only in the fringe of our experience:

> My hypothesis is that a movement of the threshold downwards will
> similarly bring a mass of subconscious memories, conceptions, emotional
> feelings, and perceptions of relation, etc., into view all at once; and that if
> this enlargement of the nimbus that surrounds the sensational present is
> vast enough, while no one of the items it contains attracts our attention
> singly, we shall have the conditions fulfilled for a kind of consciousness
> in all essential respects like that termed mystical. It will be transient, if the
> change of threshold is transient. It will be of reality, enlargement, and
> illumination, possibly rapturously so. It will be of unification, for the

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[59] See Levinson (1981), who claims that mystical experiences for James reveal "not so much *another* world as [...] a *wider* world than the ones that most naturalists, positivists, moralists, and materialists affirmed" (1981: 99).

> present coalesces in it with ranges of the remote quite out of its reach
> under ordinary circumstances; and the sense of *relation* will be greatly
> enhanced. Its form will be intuitive or perceptual, not conceptual, for the
> remembered or conceived objects in the enlarged field are supposed not
> to attract the attention singly, but only to give the sense of a
> tremendous *muchness* suddenly revealed. If they attracted attention
> separately, we should have the ordinary steep-waved consciousness, and
> the mystical character would depart (1910, EPh: 159).

James is, again, expressing the view that the increase in the breadth of our attention brings into view a larger portion of experienceable reality, including the relations which unify various elements of it. Such a sense will give us an intuitive grasp of a wider reality's dynamic meaning. But, as soon as we focus our attention to get a more concrete grasp on this experience, the breadth and the dynamic meaning of such an experience departs.[60]

§3.7 MORAL CONVERSION

In this chapter I have been interested in presenting James's model of moral realism. James wants an account of how our ideals are responsive to something other than our subjective opinion. One example I gave were "spontaneous intuitions" regarding the appropriateness of some ideal or act, the (potential) reality of which was explained by the fringe awareness of that ideal's relation to a wider reality (§2.5). The margins of our experience contain elements and relations which we are only barely conscious of. In the previous section, we saw an increase in awareness of these fringe elements correlates with a greater (though only intuitive) grasp of ethical truth (§3.6). But James also has descriptions of how such marginal or transmarginal aspects of experience can effect us even *without* our conscious awareness. I shall call these "moral conversion" cases.

By a "conversion", I mean a case in which someone's outlook or world-view is radically changed, apparently very suddenly. We usually reserve the word for cases in which the outcome is a religious world-view. James explores such cases in his *Varieties* (1902). But he is quite clear that there are non-religious examples of conversions, where the resulting outlook is solely ethical or atheistic (1902, VRE: 168). As the structure is identical in religious and non-religious cases, I will use the word "conversion" to describe the general case.

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[60] See Wild (1969: 313-329) for an overview of James's approach to religious and mystical experiences, and their potential epistemic merit.

Conversion cases concern instances in which apparently spontaneous radical changes occur in an individual's habits and moral life. The results are either new habits and ideals, or a new awareness of the significance of old habits and ideals:

> We have a thought, or we perform an act, repeatedly, but on a certain day the real meaning of the thought peals through us for the first time, or the act has suddenly turned into a moral impossibility (1902, VRE: 163).

I use the word "significance" here, though James does not. In these passages, James tends to talk of certain ideas or areas of experience becoming "hot" or "live". By "hot" places in consciousness, James means "the group of ideas [experiences] to which he devotes himself and from which he works". James calls this "*the habitual centre of his personal energy*" (1902, VRE: 163). By conversion cases, James means cases in which there are extensive changes in the habitually "hot" places of our consciousness. As a result of new habitual centres of attention and interest emerging, a radical shift in behaviour is produced.

We have already seen that James connects habitual centres of attention with his notion of *self.* Our selves are made up of our habitual centres of attention and corresponding actions (V.3.3). In a strict sense, then, when we have a conversion experience, we are shifting from one *self* or character to another. To a certain extent, such a view commits James to a very variable conception of self. And, indeed, James holds that in different contexts, and in different moods, we have different centres of attention, demonstrate different behaviours, and in this sense, demonstrate different characters. As we live our lives, some of these "selves" are central, and drive the majority of our activities, others are peripheral, waiting for their context, and many others exist only in potential, and "never come to anything" (1902, VRE: 160-1).

By a conversion experience, however, James means something different from this relatively trivial sense in which we alter our characters depending on context. Conversions represent radical shifts in our *habitual* or regular centres of attention. In such cases, what were once our peripheral ideas and interests become central, and those ideas and interests which were previously central become peripheral. One of these previously merely potential selves become realised, and some previously realised self becomes merely potential. Our focal centre shifts, and our previous systems of ideas and habits are forced to "re-crystallize" around a new centre (1902, VRE: 163).[61]

Radical shifts in our habitual centres of attention can occur in two ways. They can be sudden, immediate, and (apparently) spontaneous. Or they can be deliberate, conscious, and slow acting. He calls the latter the "volitional type" and the former the "type by self-

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[61] Another way we might think of such cases are as more or less permanent "Gestalt shifts" in our centres of attention (1890, PP 1: 418-9).

surrender". Volitional cases are more or less un-mysterious. They involve "the building up, piece by piece, [… of] a new set of moral and [or] spiritual habits" (1902, VRE: 170). James likens it to an athlete or musician learning their craft. In such cases, it is through dedicated practice and effortful attention that we alter our habits. We saw a moral case of volitional conversion when we looked at the alcoholic attempting to change their habitual centres of attention (V.6.2).

The more sudden or spontaneous cases seem more mysterious, and are more likely to be attributed to some external, possibly divine, source as the cause of this spontaneous change (1902, VRE: 186-7). But James does not think such cases *are* generally as sudden as they appear. Instead, James suggests that they are most likely the result of "subconscious" or subliminal processes:

> I explained the shifting of men's centres of personal energy […] as partly
> due to explicitly conscious process of thought and will, but as largely also
> to the subconscious incubation and maturing of motives deposited by the
> experiences of life. When ripe, the results hatch out, or burst into flower
> (1902, VRE: 188).

By "subconscious" processes, James means the marginal or transmarginal parts of experience. These are the elements of experience which we are aware of only peripherally, if at all. Nonetheless, a growth of "the experiences of life" being "incubated" in the margin of our experience can eventually "hatch out" and alter our centres of attention.[62]

How is this meant to take place? James's thought is something like this: through our everyday life, we might encounter various experiences which challenge the centre of our attention. Now, precisely due to where our attention is centred, we may well be blind to such experiences, or we may deliberately ignore them, and put them aside. Nonetheless,

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[62] Such moral conversion cases are a good remedy to the suspicion that James's position on temperament prevents him from thinking people's moral sensitivities can change. Myers is one such scholar, who worries that James's focus on temperament meant that he overlooked the role of discourse and argument in changing our minds:

> James underestimated the alterability of the philosophical nerves in one's
> temperament through dialogue and debate […] Whatever James may have said
> at times, he did not believe that arguments could have sufficient force to modify
> one's philosophical prejudices or preconceptions; this resistance to the
> arguments of others is often overlooked by readers charmed by the sincerity and
> graciousness of James's "personal method" (Myers, 1986: 393).

My view is that James *did* allow the capacity for us to be swayed, through attention to certain portions of experience (even if subconscious), to quite radically different positions. Argument is one of the methods by which such a transition can occur. Temperament does not trap us in one mind set, but represents a sensitivity to a certain kind of experience or evidence.

such experiences exist in the margins of our experiences. If we meet more experiences which challenge our habitual centres of attention in the same way, then the number of these challenging experiences might grow in the subconscious margins of our experience. Though we do not consciously attend to these peripheral concerns, they nonetheless grow as new instances relate to one another, and they begin to threaten the stability of our established view-point. Eventually, some event will bring to a head the various rebel experiences lurking in the periphery. "Emotional occasions", James tells us, "especially violent ones, are extremely potent in precipitating mental rearrangements" (1902, VRE: 164). But the emotional stimuli are not, strictly speaking, the cause of the conversion. They merely let loose the processes already at work in the margins of our experience:

> A mental system may be undermined or weakened by this interstitial alteration just as a building is, and yet for a time keep upright by dead habit. But a new perception, a sudden emotional shock, or an occasion which lays bare the organic alteration, will make the whole fabric fall together, and then the centre of gravity sinks into an attitude more stable, for the new ideas that reach the centre in the rearrangement seem now to be locked there, and the new structure remains permanent (1902, VRE: 163).

The actual conversion experience, then, is "the proverbial last straw added to the camel's load" (1902, VRE: 147).

In some places, James links these conversion experiences to the activities of a subliminal self. As the transmarginal elements of experience grow, they might show themselves through "unmistakeable signs" such as the intrusion into our normal activities of "unaccountable impulses to act, or inhibitions of action, or obsessive ideas, or even of hallucinations of sight or hearing" (1902, VRE: 191). These intrusions are calls to a new way of thinking and behaving. When the conversion comes, it is "connected with the possession of an active subliminal self", which these intruding impulses represent (1902, VRE: 195; 1909, PU: 130). A new habitual centre of attention, energy, and activity is developed, and the previously subliminal self becomes the conscious self.[63]

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[63] Elsewhere, James talks about conversion experiences as one way in which "bound energies are set loose":

> [Conversions] unify, and put a stop to, ancient mental interferences. The result is freedom, and often a great enlargement of power (1907, ERM: 143).

According to this account, conversions occur when some motivating ideal, some idea which might let the individual to release more than their customarily used mental energies, is at work in the margins of consciousness for years, before this pent up ideal breaks through the habits and ideas which were preventing this expression of energy. See §3.8.

The account James offer us, then, is one in which experiences of which we are barely conscious can nonetheless make their "deposit" on the fringes of our awareness. In the margins of our experience, these various experiences, motives, and ideals "incubate". We might customarily ignore certain facts, certain feelings, certain experiences, the ideals of other people, the demands we consider inconsequential, the significance of some object we do not customarily attend to, and arguments we do not wish to engage with. But these remain on the fringes of experience. And, overtime, they might make their influence felt, and eventually radically change our centres of attention and action.

There are occasions when James explicitly describes moral conversion experiences in a very similar way to the religious cases. Consider the following passage, for instance:

> This higher vision of an inner significance in what, until then, we had realised only in the dead external way, often comes over person suddenly; and when it does so, it makes an epoch in his history. As Emerson says, there is a depth in those moments that constrains us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences. The passion of love will shake one like an explosion, or some act will awaken a remorseful compunction that hangs like a cloud over all one's later days (1899, TT: 138-139).

James is appealing to experiences in which previously "dead" ideals become "live" as the result of a sudden emotional experience. Such a new awareness of the significance of some object can have a profound effect on the future habits and interests of that person. They are usually accompanied by a change in, or widening of, our moral vision. We are constrained to ascribe a sense of reality to such experiences, in the way we explored in the previous section (§3.6). And as the result of such experiences, "a new centre and a new perspective must be found" (1899, TT: 138). The account James offers in 1902 merely adds more detail concerning the experiential subconscious processes that accompany such a radical shift in moral perspective.

In "Moral Philosopher", James also seems to attribute similar "subconscious" forces to the societal level. In a culture, too, there are conventionally recognised goods, ideals, and obligations, and those which are ignored. There is a "centre" and a "margin" to society. James describes the suppressed ideals and demands which exist on the margins of what a current society considers right in much the same way as he describes the experiences which exist on the margins of a particular person's experience:

> Pent in under every system of moral rules are the innumerable persons who it weighs upon, and goods which it represses; and these are always rumbling and grumbling in the background, and ready for any issue by which they may get free (1891, WB: 156).

The demands, ideals, and goods which are genuinely significant may be pushed to the margins of what is acknowledged by the society as a whole, but they do not disappear.

And from the margins, their influence might be felt on the centre, eventually effecting it in radical ways.

Conversion cases, then, offer us another way in which James thinks we can be sensitive to our wider environment. Having what James calls a "strongly developed ultra-marginal life" can make us more liable to "incursions" from those elements of experience which we habitually ignore.[64]

§3.8 THE STRENUOUS MOOD AND MORAL ENERGIES

In the previous chapter I briefly mentioned the strenuous mood, which is the mood we adopt when we are willing to undergo great hardships in order to reach our ideal (V.6.2). This mood allows us to attend to difficult aspects of experience which we would in other moods avoid attending to, and it can help us overcome habits which in other moods we might adhere to (1891, WB: 159-160; 1902, VRE: 215).

It is clear that James considers the adoption of the strenuous mood to be a kind of paradigm shift in perspective. When we transfer from the easy-going mood to the strenuous mood, then:

> [t]he whole scale of values of our motives and impulses then undergoes a change like that which a change of the observer's level produces on a view [...] The consequence is an instant abandonment of the more trivial projects with which we have been dallying, and an instant practical acceptance of the more grim and earnest alternative which till then could not extort our mind's consent (1890, PP 2: 1140; 1892, BC: 372).

James uses familiar perceptual language to describe this shift. The mood brings a change in view, and allows us to focus on some significant element of experience which previously could not move us, or to "consent" to the realisation of some difficult object (V.3.1; V.6.2). The strenuous mood, then, is a method for focusing our moral attention on morally significant but difficult objects, resulting in a difference in our subsequent behaviour.

Such a sudden shift in our field of moral attention resembles a moral conversion experience, though it is typically less permanent (§3.7). Like conversion cases, the strenuous mood results in the alteration of the centres of habitual attention, and is often

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[64] It could be that spontaneous intuitions are instances of having such a developed ultra-marginal life (see §2.4).

brought on by extremes in emotion. James tells us that the most obvious of these is "grief and fear" (1890, PP 2: 1140). Being afraid, or losing something or someone important, can allow us to see what is truly significant in our lives. This is part of the reason James tells us in the *Principles* that the strenuous mood is characterised by sobriety and sombreness. In "Moral Philosopher", James extends the list of relevant emotions, saying simply that the strenuous mood "needs the wilder passions to arouse it, the big fears, loves, and indignations; or else the deeply penetrating appeal of some one of the higher fidelities, like justice, truth, or freedom" (1891, WB: 160).

Though mostly positive about such a "strenuous mood" in his early writings, James becomes more ambiguous about it over time. James returns to the idea in the *Varieties*, where he indicates that though the mood might lead us to see and pursue the good, it is not itself necessarily positive. Despite its role in moral life, James connects the "grimness, earnestness, [and] severity of character" which is indicative of the strenuous mood with irascibility and the "fighting temper". The strenuous mood is placed on a continuum with more destructive impulses. As James puts it:

> Earnestness means willingness to live with energy, though energy bring pain. The pain may be pain to other people of pain to one's self – it makes little difference; for when the strenuous mood is on one, the aim is to break something, no matter whose or what. Nothing annihilates an inhibition as irresistibly as anger does it […] This is what makes it so invaluable an ally of every other passion. The sweetest delights are trampled on with a ferocious pleasure the moment they offer themselves as checks to a cause by which our higher indignations are elicited. It costs then nothing to drop friendships, to renounce long-rooted privileges and possession, to break with social ties. Rather do we take a stern joy in the astringency and desolation; and what is called weakness of character seems in most cases to consist in the ineptitude for these sacrificial moods, of which one's own inferior self and its pet softnesses must often be the targets and the victims (1902, VRE: 214).

The strenuous mood is here presented as a kind of righteous anger or aggression, which allows us to realise some ideal at the expense of other people's, or at the expense of our own weaker selves. It is an explicitly "sacrificial mood", and what is sacrificed is, from the perspective of the mood itself, irrelevant. The effectiveness of our ideals depends on the amount of "steam-pressure" it can generate to drive "the character in the ideal direction" (1902, VRE: 215). The strenuous mood is something which can generate or release this steam pressure, and motivate us to move in a given direction. But there is no guarantee that it moves us in the *right* direction.

The strenuous mood is particularly important when we are moving past things which limit our energy or motivation. These impediments to action include "[o]ur conventionality, our shyness, laziness, and stinginess, our demands for precedent and

permission, for guarantee and surety, our small suspicions, timidities, [and] despairs" (1902, VRE: 215). As such, the strenuous mood is relevant when we have to act on some novel ideal, some ideal which convention does not recognise, and for which there are no existent supports (§3.5). The strenuous mood gives us the *courage* to move past habitual constraints, and act on a risky ideal. James tells us this courage can be let loose in us by "trustful hope", by an "inspiring example", and by "love" and "wrath" (1902, VRE: 215n191).

It is clear that the strenuous mood is not consistent with other features of moral inquiry James holds to be important, such as holding our ideals to be fallible hypotheses, increasing the breadth of our moral vision, and accepting and encouraging diversity and criticism. It represents a focusing or a narrowing of our moral attention in a way that motivates us to act with earnestness on behalf of one ideal. As such the strenuous mood, by itself, would be anathema to objective moral inquiry. By itself, it is mere self-righteous and monistic dogmatism. Nonetheless, *some* form of moral strenuousness is useful and perhaps even required for motivating us to attend to difficult moral objects, or act under novel moral ideals. As such the value of the strenuous mood to moral inquiry is somewhat ambiguous.[65]

The strenuous mood is just one mood which focuses or galvanises our moral attention and action. In later papers, James explores the kinds of moods and emotions which are effective on moral attention, or for releasing our pent-up energies. In fact, he calls for a "*methodological programme of scientific inquiry*" concerning the limits of human energy, and the ways we might have of increasing them, or of unlocking hidden reserves (1907, ERM: 150). This is not (just) an intellectual inquiry, but concerns both the "national economy" and our "individual ethics". It is part of an effective moral inquiry to determine how best to empower individuals to think, perceive, and act energetically within their moral landscape.

Let us explore some of James's findings in his brief forays into this inquiry. In "The Energies of Men" (1907), James suggests that having an increase in energy levels is the most "important thing that can happen to a man" (1907, ERM: 130). Allowing our energies to be released is the difference between being fully alive or not:

> Everyone is familiar with the phenomenon of feeling more or less alive on different days. Everyone knows that on any given day that there are energies slumbering in him which the incitements of the day do not call forth, but which he might display if these were greater. Most of us feel as

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[65] We could suggest that moral strenuousness is instrumentally good, but that we assess its legitimacy on the basis of the ideals which it helps to realise. However, elsewhere James indicates that human life finds meaning through the earnest struggle against perceived evil. This would give the strenuous mood itself some intrinsic value. We return to this notion of human meaning in the next chapter (VII.1.2).

> if we lived habitually with a sort of cloud weighing on us, below our highest notch of clearness in discernment, sureness in reasoning, or firmness in deciding. Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake (1907, ERM: 131).

Limitations in our energies correspond to limitations in our capacity to attend to our environment and act within it. As our energies rise, so too does our capacity to attend to difficult objects, or to a wider range of experience, to perceive matters clearly and act decisively. This notion of achieving our full energy potential is as close as James gets to a notion of human flourishing. We have a sort of obligation to ourselves to become fully "awake" to the world in which we live, through raising our personal energies. According to James, "[e]veryone feels that his total *power* rises when he passes to a higher *qualitative* level of life" (1907, ERM: 149). We are empowered to act as we gain more energy, and we are able to attend to a wider range of experience towards which to act. However, due to various habitual constraints, most of us operate below our maximal levels of power and energy.[66]

What are these habitual constraints on our energies? According to James, they are both social and personal, and include habitual constraints of decorum, as well as personal inhibitions (1907, ERM: 131). The kinds of forces which push us to higher levels of energy are "emotional excitement" or ideas of "necessity" which induce us to "make an extra effort of the will" (1907, ERM: 132). James talks about love (1907, ERM: 133), war (1907, ERM: 134); drugs (1907, ERM: 136); and ascetic discipline (1907, ERM: 136-7) as methods of increasing our energies. There are also certain socially motivating "abstract ideas" which do the same:

> As certain objects naturally awaken love, anger, or cupidity, so certain ideas naturally awaken the energies of loyalty, courage, endurance, and devotion. When these ideas are effective in an individual's life, their effect is often very great indeed. They may transfigure it, unlocking innumerable powers which, but for the idea, would never have come into play. "Fatherland," "The Union," "Holy Church," the "Monroe Doctrine," "Truth," "Science," "Liberty," [...] are so many examples of energy-releasing abstract ideas. The *social* nature of all such phrases is an essential factor of their dynamic power. They are forces of detent in situations in which no other force produces equivalent effects, and each is a force of detent only in a specific group of men (1907, ERM: 142).[67]

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[66] "[A]s a rule, men habitually use only a small part of the powers which they actually possess and which they might use under appropriate conditions" (1907, ERM: 150).

[67] We might add "God" to this list of motivating abstract ideas (see 1891, WB: 161; §4). There is no obvious distinction between what James here calls "abstract ideas" and what he has previously called "ideals", apart from the obvious social dimension of the ideals he examines here. See Lekan (2007: 31-45) for an examination of how the belief in God can influence the "strenuous mood".

When such ideas energise us, we can consider them "live". The kind of person we are, the kinds of temperaments we have, and the kinds of social contexts which we find ourselves in, can determine whether these ideas will be live for us (1907, ERM: 141). For instance, prayer or mediation can help us release hidden stores of energy. But those who have been educated into a materialistic world-view will be unable to access such methods. According to James, our lives would be much "freer and abler" if "such important forms of energizing [were] not sealed up by the critical atmosphere in which we have been reared" (1907, ERM: 160).[68]

Despite the evident importance James places on energy, and releasing our energetic potential, we should not be tempted to agree with Franzese (2008), and think that James is presenting us with an ethics in which right and wrong is reducible to what can or cannot release energy in an individual person (V.1.3). Such a view would be in direct contradiction with James's other statements regarding moral inquiry. Rather, we should read James as suggesting that any full moral inquiry should contain an examination of the abstract ideas, emotions, exercises and objects which can allow us to reach higher levels of energy and attention, and in which contexts. On this reading, James is (thankfully) not saying that because the notion of "The Fatherland" can release human energies in certain contexts that it is right in those contexts. James is saying, rather, that seeing as our capacity to attend to and act on morally salient aspects of experience is dependent on having sufficient energy, then a study concerning human energy is a necessary part of moral inquiry.

§3.9 MORAL AND EPISTEMIC VIRTUES

The purpose of this section was to provide an account of moral inquiry which was capable of reaching some non-arbitrary truth. I suggested at the beginning of this section that, rather than offering us a well-defined procedural account of moral inquiry, James

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[68] In "The Powers of Men" (1907), a later version of "The Energies of Men", James places more emphasis on moral instances of energy loosening. Promises, and other self-made obligations, can motivate us to great efforts to keep them. Placing people in positions of responsibility can enable them to act with more dedication and focus than they otherwise would. Duty is a strong force in compelling people to go above and beyond their usual reserves of effort (1907, ERM: 142-3; 152). But presumably we must *already* care about people, and feel the responsibility of duty and obligation, in order to be motivated in this way. We should interpret James's claims here as saying that one we have attended to such morally salient features of experience, then they can generate their own sources of energy and motivation.

offers us a virtue account of what makes a good inquirer. Here I aim to recap the various virtues we've seen James appeal to throughout this section.[69]

The most basic of the requirements which any moral inquirer must have is a desire to find the truth. The philosopher is the person who demands that there must be objectivity in our moral dealings, but we have seen that James attributes this demand to anyone who wishes to assert their own moral ideals to be valid (§3.1). Of course, the kind of truth such an inquirer must be committed to is an empirical kind of truth. We should hold our ideals to be fallible hypotheses about the good, which are susceptible to revision or confirmation in the light of the future experience of ourselves and others.

One immediate problem appears to emerge when we treat our ideals as *hypotheses* about the good. The necessary detachment from our own ideals which is required for us to hold them as fallible hypotheses would, on this view, render them motivationally inert. We can answer this concern by looking at what James means by an hypothesis. Firstly, it is important to note that no ideal which we hold presents itself as being absolutely true. The only notion of absolute truth which a pragmatist empiricist can acknowledge is an hypothesis' tendency to be confirmed by the relevant experience in the long-run. Therefore, if we want to assert our ideals as true, then we are committed to showing this truth by comparing our ideal with a variety of different experiences, and exposing it to challenges from opposing views. Secondly, and connectedly, James thinks that seeing something as an hypothesis *itself* generates motivation to discover evidence for or against it. It comes with "a fever of desire for verification" (1880, WB: 186; §3.1). The only way in which we can verify an ideal (considered as an hypothesis about the good) is to live according to this ideal, in order to access experience concerning its validity. Therefore, considering our ideals to be hypotheses does not preclude us being motivated by them.[70]

We have a basic store of moral beliefs, ideas, and concepts by virtue of being part of some community. We inherit them from previous generations, who themselves asserted various hypotheses which were more or less successful. Our inherited moral beliefs represent the more successful of these hypotheses. As such they deserve respect (§3.2; I.5). However, they can also lead to us being blinded to demands and goods which our ancestors ignored or were not aware of. This "ancestral blindness", if not challenged, can lead to prejudice and cruelty. However, a recognition of this blindness, and of our own

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[69] I suspect that Putnam and Putnam come close to the interpretation I offer here. They suggest that James offers us an "imperfect procedural conception" of morality, combined with a "vision of personal responsibility, personal feeling and commitment, bounded by respect for the moral visions and commitments of others" (1990: 225).

[70] Of course, this answer will only potentially satisfy empiricists. Rationalists and intuitionists who believe our ideals have some *a priori* or self-certifying validity will have to be referred to James's arguments against these positions, and for empiricism.

limits in sensitivity concerning the significance of different portions of the world, can lead us to recognise the importance of tolerance. Seeing as each of us is limited in the range of experiences that we can attend to, it will require many different people exploring their hypotheses about the good, as well as open discussion, criticism, and free comparison of different experiences, for us to make progress in ethical inquiry (§3.4).

We can think of the virtues discussed so far as the qualities which *every* inquirer will need, if a non-arbitrary end to moral inquiry is likely. Each person needs to have a desire for truth, an acceptance that their own ideals are fallible hypotheses, and a commitment to tolerance and communal inquiry. As well as these virtues, though, there are others which are indicative of good or excellent moral inquirers.

Moral sensitivity is one such virtue. A sensitivity to a certain kind of experience can lead us to make the right kinds of hypotheses, and look in the right kinds of places for confirmation experiences. Certain people, James suggests, are "geniuses" in the sense of being sensitive to the significance of elements of reality which are conventionally ignored, or in the sense of being sensitive to a wider range of experience than the normal person (§3.3; 3.6). The sensitivity of such people can help them generate novel hypotheses, and give a generally better sense of the direction of truth. Though this sensitivity is often conscious, it is rarely intellectual, but described in sensational or intuitive terms (§3.6). And this sensitivity can also work "subconsciously", in the margins of our conscious experience, and only reveal itself to our conscious selves through sudden shifts in attention at certain emotive moments (§3.7).

Attending to novel objects is often difficult. By definition, these novel ideals represent interruptions of our customary ways of acting and valuing. Being able to exercise effort in attending to difficult objects is a virtue which we looked at in an earlier chapter (V.6.1). But it also takes a certain kind of courage to, at personal, existential, and epistemic risk, adopt and act under a novel hypothesis (§3.3; 3.5). The willingness to act on an ideal which has not yet been confirmed by others is the "same moral quality which we call courage in practical affairs" (1882, WB: 76). Without courage and effort, no new hypotheses would be tested, and no new moral discoveries would be made.

James points to the strenuous mood as helpful, and perhaps required, when attending to and acting under some novel ideal. However, the strenuous mood must be tempered with the other virtues if it is not to descend into mere monistic dogmatism (§3.8). Alongside the strenuous mood, James lists a variety of emotions, abstract ideas, and exercises and substances which can increase our energy. Effort, courage, motivation, and attention, all depend on the amount of energy which we can release in ourselves. As

such, and exploration into the kinds of things which effect human beings' energies will be a necessary part of moral inquiry (§3.8).[71]

The full list of virtues which an excellent moral inquirer will possess, then, is the following: a desire for objectivity; the capacity to see their own ideals as fallible hypotheses; a tolerance of other people; commitment to communal inquiry; a sensitivity to a wide array of moral objects and their relations; a sensitivity to novel areas of moral experience; a willingness to make effort; the courage to take risks; and the requisite energy to perform the above. As we saw in the previous chapter (V), many of these virtues, such as responsiveness to others, sensitivity to significance, a commitment to fallibilism, and moral strenuousness, are the very virtues which allow us to perceive and meet our ethical obligations. This should not come as a surprise. For James, honestly searching for truth by sympathetically engaging with other people *is* how we conduct moral inquiry. James's list of moral virtues and his list of epistemic virtues, then, should be more or less identical.

One place James describes someone who resembles such a virtuous person is in his 1897 Decoration Day address. This speech was given at the unveiling of a statue dedicate to the bravery of the 54th civil war regiment, an all black regiment, led by the white Robert Gould Shaw. What impresses James is not the military virtues of Shaw and the 54th, but Shaw's "civic" virtues. Out of a sense of duty, Shaw left a comfortable military position, with a strong chance of promotion and decoration, to join with the depreciated 54th. James's words here are worth quoting in full:

> Man is once and for all a fighting animal; centuries of peaceful history could not breed the battle-instinct out of us, and our pugnacity is the virtue least in need of reinforcement by reflection, least in need of orator's or poet's help.
>
> What we really need poet's and orator's help to keep alive in us is not, then, the common and gregarious courage which Robert Shaw showed when he marched with you, men of the Seventh Regiment. It is that more lonely courage which he showed when he dropped his warm commission in the glorious Second to head your dubious fortunes, negroes of the Fifty-fourth. That lonely kind of courage (civic courage we call it in peace times) is the kind of valor to which the monuments of nations should most of all be reared, for the survival of the fittest has not bred it into the bone of human beings as it has bred military valor; and of five hundred of us who could storm a battery side by side with others, perhaps not one

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[71] Talisse and Aikin (2011: 8-9) raise the worry that James's axiological pluralism encourages moral conflict, because some (dogmatic) stances on what is good require the rejection of other stances (for instance, religious fanaticism). The fact that our attitude of strenuousness must always be tempered with other (epistemic) virtues such as fallibilism prevents James from endorsing these kinds of dogmatic conflicts. See III.3.

> would be found ready to risk his worldly fortunes all alone in resisting an enthroned abuse. The deadliest enemies of nations are not their foreign foes; they always dwell within their borders. And from these internal enemies civilization is always in need of being saved. The nation blest above all nations is she in whom the civic genius of the people does the saving day by day, by acts without external picturesqueness; by speaking, writing, voting reasonably; by smiting corruption swiftly; by good temper between parties; by the people knowing true men when they see them, and preferring them as leaders to rabid partisans or empty quacks. Such nations have no need of wars to save them (1897, ERM: 72-73).

James distinguishes between two types of courage in this address. The military form of courage enables us to fight, with others, for some conventionally recognised good (such as our country). The civic form of courage, on the other hand, is what allowed Shaw to act against "an enthroned abuse" (the depreciation of the all black regiment) and act against his own interests to tackle such an abuse. Shaw didn't dogmatically fight for a received set of ideals. Nor was he fighting for some personal, arbitrary ideal. Rather, Shaw's sensitivity allowed him to recognise an abuse in his culture, and his courage allowed him to act for its removal. It is through acts such as Shaw's that the world is made better over time, an idea we shall return to in our final chapter.

Given the vague, virtue lead notion of moral inquiry which James puts forward, we should not expect to find direct and linear moral progress. And James does not think that we do:

> [A]lways the ancestral blindness returns and wraps us up, so that we end once more by thinking that creation can be for no other purpose than to develop remarkable situations and conventional distinctions and merits. And then always some new leveller in the shape of a religious prophet has to arise – the Buddha, the Christ, or some Saint Francis, some Rousseau or Tolstoi – to redispel our blindness. Yet, little by little, there comes some stable gain; for the world does get more humane, and the religion of democracy tends towards permanent increase (1899, TT: 156).

Our moral inquiry is faltering, and it contains pit-stops and reversals. But on a long enough timeline, provided individuals of enough sensitivity and courage emerge, things tend to get better. As individuals, in our current contexts, all we can do is "seek incessantly, with fear and trembling, so to vote and to act to bring about the very largest total universe of good which we can see" (1891, WB: 158). It is this progress towards a good outcome which we will return to in the next chapter.[72]

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[72] Many of these virtues seem to be embodied in James's concept of "saintliness", which for James is a state of being which consists in an un-selfish awareness of a "wider life", and a "shifting of the emotional centre towards loving and harmonious affections" (1902, VRE: 220). However, as saintliness is reserved by James as a religious state, requiring the recognition of some ideal power,

§4. THE ROLE OF THE SUPERNATURAL IN JAMES'S ETHICS

Before ending this chapter, it will be valuable to look at one more aspect of James's ethics. This section argues that, prior to his move to radical empiricism, James postulated supernatural or divine forces to provide the objectivity that his ethics required. Looking at the role that this appeal to the supernatural plays for James will reveal not just an instance of James's commitment to objectivity in ethics, but a reason for moving to an account of Jamesian ethics based on radical empiricism. This section first explores James's reasons for bringing in divine or supernatural forces to do substantive normative work (§4.1; §4.2); before looking at some of the problems which emerge from such an appeal (§4.3); and arguing that the radical empiricist position presented in this chapter is preferable (§4.4).

§4.1 GOD AND OBJECTIVITY

In "Moral Philosopher", the eponymous philosopher is defined by the demand that there be some objective order to be found in the apparently chaotic mass of demands and obligations. We need some objective indication that, when goods conflict, some are more worthy of being realised than others. However, in making such a claim, we cannot appeal to a standard outside of experience. It is part of James's definition of demands, goods, and obligations, that their *esse* is *percipi*. As such, when we are making some claim about one demand being more obligatory or more worthy of being realised than others, these claimed relations between different goods must also be experiential. As James puts it,

> [l]ike the positive attributes good and bad, the comparative ones better and worse must be *realized* in order to be real. If one ideal judgement be objectively better than another, that betterness must be made flesh by being lodged concretely in someone's actual perception (1891, WB: 147).

and I will argue in the next section that the recognition of religious objects should not be required of the moral life, I shall continue to talk of morally virtuous people, and reject religious interpretations of James's ethics which see the saint as "the apex of moral perfection" (Brennan, 1961: 154; Suckiel 1996: 111). See Slater (2009: 150-154) for a nuanced exploration of James's concept of saintliness and its possible role in the moral life, and moral progress.

This is an instance of James's by now familiar claim that everything real must be experiential. Here James is asserting that both the moral demands, and the relations we discover between them, are real only insofar as they are experienc*ed*.

In this passage, and similar passages in "Moral Philosopher", James makes a nominalistic assumption regarding his own position. James assumes that for there to be some experiential relation between goods, such as one being better or more worthy of being realised than another, then these relations must *actually be experienced* by some agent. The nominalistic version of his thesis that reality is fundamentally experiential is rejected by the time James explores it in his radical empiricism papers (IV.6.1). But here, this nominalism leads James to require the existence of some divine being.

James's argument for the necessity of God, on practical grounds, goes something like this: The philosopher makes the claim that there is an objective way of ordering the moral landscape; ordering all the various claims means that there must be relations of betterness and worseness between them; on James's account the existence of such relations requires an actual experiencer of them; and so, if there is to be a discoverable objectivity about how all claims are to be organised, we must assume a concrete being in whose experience all of the claims are now so organised. As such a feat is impossible for human beings, the philosopher is constrained to hope for the existence of God. Here is James presenting this argument in "Moral Philosopher":

> It would seem […] that the stable and systematic moral universe for which the ethical philosopher asks is fully possible only in a world where there is a divine thinker with all-enveloping demands. If such a thinker existed, his way of subordinating the demands to one another would be the finally valid casuistic scale; his claims would be the most appealing; his ideal universe would be the most inclusive realizable whole. If he now exist, then actualized in his thought already must be that ethical philosophy which we seek as the pattern which our own must evermore approach (1891, WB: 161).

Exactly *how* this divine thinker organises the various competing demands is not currently available to any mortal thinker. As James puts it in his 1878-1885 "Notes on Ethics": "[a]ll that a god does is to make us sure that there *is* an objective good, - He doesn't tell us *what* it is" (1878-1885, MEN: 307). James is *not* telling us that the faithful have access to some moral truth which others do not. We will still have to embark on communal moral inquiry if we are to discover the objective moral truth. What James *is* telling us is that the regulative assumption of moral inquiry – that there *is* some objective

way of organising competing demands – requires us to assume the existence of a being in whose experience that order is realised.[73]

James also thinks that the idea of God can provide us with motivation to adopt the strenuous mood (§3.8). If we think that all ideals, demands, and obligations are rooted only in subjective preference, then we can "play fast and loose with them at will", and have less reason to adopt the strenuous mood when such ideals are threatened. James thinks that the atheist can still lead a moral life (life is still what he calls "a genuine ethical symphony"), but that without the capacity to see our moral lives as grounded in something more objective, any "appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulating power". When, however, we recognise God as making objective claims upon us, then "the infinite perspective opens out", and we are capable of seeing some demands and ideals as being "imperative", and as feeling their real "objectivity and significance". As such, the perspective which God allows means that we can adopt the strenuous mood, and act with more energy on behalf of those ideals we feel to be genuinely significant. According to James, this function of God in our practical lives is so profound, that even were there no other reasons for adopting belief in a divine being, "men would postulate one simply as pretext for living hard, and getting out of the game of existence its keenest possible zest" (1891, WB: 160-161).[74]

In actual fact, what James is appealing to as having this motivational force is not necessarily a divine being, but a sense of real objectivity in our ethical lives. It is James's nominalistic interpretation of his ethics which means that he thinks that this requires a divine experiencer.[75]

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[73] Suckiel suggests that we should think of God as "nothing but an empty placeholder" in this sense. The concept of God does not justify any particular set of moral values, but only serves as a "metaphysical foundation to support the idea that moral value is constituted by the most inclusive satisfaction of demand" (1996: 108).

[74] See Bird, 1986: 157; Suckiel 1982: 61; Slater 2009: 71 and Lekan 2007, for more on the motivational role of God. Religious beliefs can, similarly, provide therapeutic benefit for certain persons, so that they can maintain the "athletic [strenuous] attitude" when "morbid fears" invade (1902, VRE: 45). Goodman (2002: 36-48) unites James and Wittgenstein in this regard.

[75] In this I disagree with Michael R. Slater's otherwise excellent interpretation of James's religious philosophy. According to Slater, as well as needing God to ground objectivity in ethics (2007b: 30-36), James holds that religious belief is necessary for human beings to adopt a morally strenuous attitude, and so to achieve full human flourishing (2007a: 116-117; 2007b: 4-6; 43-44; 2009: 86-88). Slater recognises that on James's model we *can* live a moral life without religion, but holds that religion - seen as a metaphysically realist commitment to a "wider self" or "unseen order" – is required for us follow our moral obligations with joy and love, rather than from a sense of duty alone (Slater, 2007a: 124; see 1902, VRE: 49). However, James's position on what constitutes "religion" is very broad. It is not clear at all that the kind of metaphysically robust moral realism of the sort I am postulating here would *not* count as religion in the relevant sense, as Slater himself acknowledges in the following:

§4.2 IDEAL REFERENCE AND THE "UNSEEN WORLD"

As well as appealing to God to provide an account of objectivity in ethics, James sometimes appeals to an unseen divine or supernatural realm to provide an account of reference. This is clearest in his paper "Is Life Worth Living?" (1895). As we have already seen, we must think of our ideals as having some reference outside of ourselves if they are going to be motivating (§1.2; §1.3). And in order to be motivating, these ideals must have reference in a world which is not completely determined. This cannot be supplied by the deterministic account of the natural world which was dominant in physical science at the time. Therefore, James appealed outside of this determinate natural world, to an indeterminate "unseen" world where our ideals could find their reference:

> [T]he inner need of believing that this world of nature is a sign of something more spiritual and eternal than itself is just as strong and authoritative in those who feel it, as the inner need of uniform laws of causation ever can be in a professionally scientific head. […] It is a fact of human nature, that men can live and die by the help of a sort of faith that goes without a single dogma or definition. The bare assurance that this natural order is not ultimate but a mere sign or vision, the external staging of a many-storied universe, in which spiritual forces have the last word and are eternal—this bare assurance is to such men enough to make life seem worth living in spite of every contrary presumption suggested by its circumstances on the natural plane (1895, WB: 52-53).

James thinks that this vague faith in an unseen world in which the deficiencies of the natural world can be remedied, where our ideals can find their meaning, and in which we can see them "terminating […] eventuating and bearing fruit" is what the essential features of most religions amount to (1985, WB: 53). We cannot be certain that such a world exists. But belief in such a world is required for our ideals to have reference. Seeing as it is a live possibility such a world exists, then we have the right to adopt this vague faith on James's will-to-believe grounds (VII.1.4).

> [i]f one's relation to an ontic moral order is attended by such emotions as love, joy, a desire for wholeness, etc., then it qualifies as religious on James's account (Slater, 2007a: 125).

As such, a move away from actual deities and dualistic notions of the supernatural would not prevent a Jamesian from receiving the practical benefits of religion, broadly understood, so long as they were still moral realists. In *Varieties*, James tells us that most western religions appeal to a monotheistic deity, but that "abstract moral ideals, civic or patriotic utopias, or inner versions of holiness or right may also be felt as the true lords and enlargers of our life" (1902, VRE: 220). See §3.8.

It seems clear that it is *chance* and *possibility* which is doing the real work for James here. We need a world which is indeterministic if our ideals are going to find reference. Because the natural world as described by physics appears deterministic, then James needs to appeal to some non- or super- natural world in order for our ideals to have reference.

§4.3 PROBLEMS WITH THE SUPERNATURAL

Two problems emerge from seeing God as the provider of ethical objectivity. The first is that such a view encourages dogmatism. It involves the assertion that there *is* some objective way of organising goods which now exists in some divine being's consciousness. It seems only one further step to claim access to this knowledge, possibly through some divine agency.

James himself denies that we ever have access to this divine being's knowledge. Nonetheless, he does recognise that seeing ourselves as one of God's chosen can lead us to a kind of zealotism:

> Our attitude towards concrete evils is entirely different in a world where we believe there are none but finite demanders, from what it is in one where we joyously face tragedy for an infinite demander's sake. Every sort of energy and endurance, of courage and capacity for handling life's evils, is set free in those who have religious faith. For this reason the strenuous type of character will on the battlefield of human history always outwear the easy-going type, and religion will drive irreligion to the wall (1891, WB: 161).

Seeing ourselves as in possession of an ideal which is potentially objective can lead us to adopt the strenuous mood, required for acting under this ideal in even difficult circumstances. But seeing oneself as in possession of *the* true ideal, demanded by God, will allow the adoption of the strenuous mood in the full "sacrificial" sense. Such people will dogmatically ignore and reject all different ideals, in a way that it completely counter to James's ideas regarding communal inquiry and tolerance (§3.8; §3.9). It is true that the existence of an infinite demander would make us more likely to adopt the strenuous mood, but in its negative, dogmatic aspect.

The second reason that we should reject God as the provider of objectivity in ethics, on James's own terms, concerns his consistent rejection of a finished or complete reality. This is the subject of the next chapter. Here it suffices to say that the existence of an already complete ideal world, and the existence of an omnipotent and omniscient deity

who can assure the universe is or will become perfect, gives human agents no motive to act. Such was the reason James rejected any form of Absolute in his later work. Accepting an omniscient God as the only way of achieving moral objectivity would therefore be a serious back-peddle for James.

We can say a similar thing concerning James's apparently dualistic separation of the "natural" and the "ideal" worlds. James cannot find reference for moral ideals in a naturalistic, deterministic world, so he legitimises the invocation of a second, "ideal", world in which they *can* find their reference. But this introduces all kinds of familiar problems regarding how the two worlds can relate to each other. These are not problems James is unaware of, and they are part of the reason James explicitly rejects dualism in his later metaphysics (IV.1.1).

A second problem about locating the reference of our moral ideals in an "unseen world", is that is contradicts James's mature account of reference. The pragmatist theory James puts forward sees reference as the capacity to lead us, through conjunctive experiences, to a direct experience of the referent or its immediate surroundings (IV.2). If the referent of moral ideals exists in an "unseen" world, removed from our practical, material world, then this defies not only James's experiential theory of reference, but the radical empirical strand that runs through the entirety of his thought.[76]

As such, we can conclude that there are several internal reasons to reject James's early attempts to ground objectivity and reference in supernatural beings and realms. This is why I have, in this chapter suggested a second, radical empiricist, view.

§4.4 THE RADICAL EMPIRICIST POSITION

Radical empiricism involves the rejection of the dualism between a "natural" and an "ideal" world. Pure experience is ontological prior to its division into subject and object. Before this division, it is only "virtually or potentially either object or subject" (1904, ERE: 13; IV.1.3). Included in this picture of an experiential universe are the relations

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[76] According to Polet's account of the moral will, James openly accepted such a transcendental picture: "James believed the imagination was the human capacity to move beyond sensory evidence to an entirely different kind of order and to trust that order". This "spiritual order" is, according to Polet's James, "not a thing in reality that can be known like any other thing; it is the movement in life that transcends knowledge and interests and makes life worth living" (Polet, 2001: 48). Were this to be James's considered opinion, he would have to reject all of his statements regarding moral inquiry, reject any possibility of public moral knowledge, and reject his life-long commitment to empiricism.

which unify it, themselves experiential. These include not just conjunctive, but also disjunctive relations (1904, ERE: 24; IV.1.3).

As such, James is capable of providing an account of indeterminism which does not require the separation of the natural and the ideal worlds. No set of conjunctive relations dominates over every experience. The justice radical empiricism does to disjunctive as well as conjunctive relations means that it is not committed to a view of the universe in which is bound together by one set of causal or conceptual relations. It is pluralistic, in that it holds that some elements of experience are "joined by their edges", and others are not (1904, ERE: 42). Seeing as radical empiricism is not obliged to see the world as one totality, this leaves room for indeterminism and chance.[77] Physical laws operate only on some of our experience. By isolating the portions of experience which deal with physical objects, and the conjunctive relations between them, we can indeed identify relatively determine laws which govern their interaction. But radical empiricism has no need to take the physicalist world-view which emerges from such operations as primary. There are elements of experience which do *not* fit neatly into this view, and moral experience is one.

As such, the experienceable world, considered outside of restrictive naturalism and according to radical empiricism, provides the kind of indeterminism which James thinks is required for moral reference. There is no reason to appeal to a trans-experiential "unseen" world.

The mature version of radical empiricism also does not require an *actual experience* of some object for that object to be called real. James admits the reality of potential relations and potential existence. The properties of objects, and the relations between them, which have not yet been discovered by human beings, are nonetheless "slumberingly, latently, potentially, implicitly, or *virtually* there before they [are] expressly recognised by man" (1903-1904, MEN: 37; IV.1.5). The experiential nature of these relations does not require them to be *actually* experienc*ed*, but only for them to be potentially experience*able*. Meeting the philosopher's demand that there be some objective truth about how to order our moral demands does not require the postulation of some actual experiencer who actually cognises the order of those demands. It simply requires objective, experiential, and discoverable relations to obtain between elements of our moral experience, in the ways we have been exploring in this chapter.

James himself never returned to his ethical thought with his more mature radical empiricism in hand. But this chapter argues that if he *had* done, he would not have need to postulate either a divine thinker *or* a radical split between natural and ideal worlds to provide an account of moral objectivity and reference. He does so by making the world

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[77] See IV.1.5

as we actually experience it, as complicated, messy, and rich, have ontological priory over either the "material world" of physical science or the "ideal world" of religion.

CHAPTER VII:

PROGRESS AND CREATION

§1. A POTENTIAL COMPLICATION

So far in this thesis, I have been arguing that we should interpret James's ethics (with some help from his radical empiricism) as offering us an objective and realist account. There is something outside of our subjective experiences that our hypotheses about value are responsive to, and in the long run of human inquiry, we can reach stable conclusions regarding how to organise our various moral demands. As such, James is a moral realist in the full pragmaticist sense of allowing us to reach conclusions which are independent of what is arbitrary in thought.

Before we conclude that James is a realist in this sense, though, there is a complication to consider. Alongside his statements about the objectivity of moral inquiry, James also makes some contradictory sounding claims about how holding certain ideals can in itself effect subsequent experience. In the most extreme cases, James seems to indicate that holding and acting under an ideal can effect the validity of that ideal in the long run. The most obvious example of this kind are James's "will-to-believe" type cases, in which he seems to suggest that the adoption of a belief on non-empirical grounds is legitimate if by so doing we can *make* that belief true.

This is a seemingly serious problem. The realist account of James which I have offered has linked the validity of some (moral) hypothesis with whether or not human

experience in the long run would confirm it. On a long enough time-frame, and with conscientious and curious inquirers, we can move past our individual biases and towards a non-arbitrary agreement. Now James's appears to be suggesting that an individual's adoption of a particular hypothesis itself alters the outcome of what will be found to be valid in the long run of experience. This seems to render any sense of objective inquiry illusory, seeing as now I can merely adopt any belief I want and in so doing *make* it true. It is trivial to say that truth is what would be confirmed by experience in the long run if what would be confirmed by experience in the long run is shaped by my personal whims.[1]

This section aims to explore the motivation behind James's various statements to this effect. First, we shall look at James's assertion that our practical natures require us to make a contribution to our moral landscape (§1.1); and why a world in which we merely discovered truth would be incapable of satisfying us (§1.2). Next, I shall examine the importance of the concept of "risk" in James's notion of faiths and ideals (§1.3). Finally, I will look in more detail at James's will-to-believe cases (§1.4). The next section (§2) will attempt to unify this need for our role in the creation of the moral landscape, with his statements about objective inquiry.

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[1] This problem is what Gale (1999; 2005) calls the "making-discovery aporia" (Gale, 1999: 31; 234-239; 2005: 20; 43). According to Gale, this is a fundamental tension in James's work, created by the clash of two different "selves" expressed within his philosophy: the "promethean" self which discards metaphysics and looks for naturalistic, humanistic, and scientific descriptions of reality in which creation is central, and the "mystical" self, which aims to discover a connection between itself and a wider, spiritual, universe. Cooper (2002) offers a book length refutation of Gale's interpretation, presenting a systematic account of James in which these two features of his work are unified in his "Two-levels" account. According to Cooper there are two levels to James's philosophy, the empirical level which is governed by scientific inquiries and norms, and the metaphysical level which is governed by his radical empiricism. Cooper diagnoses Gale's interpretation as a result of a false equivocation between science and scientism:

> Gale's conception of the passive anti-Promethean mystic depends too much on viewing the Promethean pragmatist's science as scientism: it is plausible only if, contrary to James's radical-empiricist metaphysics, science is inseparable from a philosophy that interprets the world in exclusively scientific terms, as material and mechanistic. As long as science doesn't collapse into scientism, there is no reason that scientific thinking can't cohabit an integrated personality with the variety of humanistic trains of thought and modes of feeling that James cherished (Cooper, 2002: 154; see 2002: 185).

Though I agree with Cooper's refutation of *Gale's* version of the making-discovering aporia, I do not think that this gets James out of the problem entirely. Without elaboration, the idea that we in some sense create (moral) truth still conflicts with the idea that we in some sense discover it. Cooper avoids this problem by making James a moral constructivist (2002: 241-257).

§1.1 The Importance of Creation

James often presents the general aim of theoretical philosophy as expressing an account of reality such that it appears to be rational to us. We recognise the rationality of some philosophical account not through some self-evident property, or *a priori* reasoning, but through certain experiences. The "subjective marks" of rationality James has is mind include "a strong feeling of ease, peace [and] rest" and a "fluency of […] thought" (1879, EPh: 32-33; 1882, WB: 57). In doing philosophy, our aim is to "enjoy simplicity and harmony" with our wider reality, and so "feel at home" in it (1881, WB: 95-6).[2]

In such passages, James is not equating what is rational with what gives us subjective satisfaction. Rather, he is suggesting that the only way in which the rationality of a concept can be indicated is through such subjective marks. Understood in this way, James's notion of rationality links with a broader sense of pragmatic inquiry shared by all pragmatists. If some belief works in our experience without disruption, then we do not doubt it. If it causes problems and unrest, then we doubt it, and we seek for another concept which works better within our experience. Finding the universe to be a rational place (or a "home") is to be able to think, act, and live in the world in a way that does not lead to us encountering severe disappointment, doubt, or other impediments.[3]

In order to appear rational to us in this sense, our general account of the universe must meet certain human needs:

> [A]ny view of the universe which shall completely satisfy the mind must obey conditions of the mind's own imposing […] Not any nature of things which may seem to *be* will also seem to be *ipso facto* rational; and if it do not seem rational, it will afflict the mind with a ceaseless uneasiness, till it be formulated or interpreted in some other and more congenial way (1881, WB: 99-100).

If a philosophy fails to meet what James calls elsewhere "our own nature's chief demands", then it will give us a sense of unease, and *ipso facto* will be deemed irrational (1909, PU: 144). Such a feeling of unease is characterised by a sense of *unheimlichkeit*, or alienation from the world (1881, WB: 71). As such, if philosophy's aim is to produce a rational theory of the world, it should strive to produce theories which are responsive to both our experience of reality *and* our own nature's demands.

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[2] In later works, James rejects talk about a theory's "rationality" in this sense (on the grounds that it carries exclusively intellectual connotations) and instead refers to the "intimacy" which the world some philosophical account allows for (e.g. 1909, PU: 145). See Lamberth (1997) for an exploration of "intimacy" in this regard.
[3] See I.2-3.

What exactly are the demands of our nature? James gives several different accounts throughout his career. In "Reflex Action and Theism" (1881), James suggests that any rational account of the universe must give room to the operation of sensation, conception, and action, as our three different facets of engagement with reality. In "The Sentiment of Rationality" (1879/1882), James suggests that both our intellectual and our practical needs must be satisfied in any account of finding the world rational. In an earlier version of this paper, "Rationality, Activity, and Faith" (1882), James elaborates on these practical needs, stating that they include: the expectancy of future experience; the capacity to draw forth active and emotional powers; and a role for our faiths.[4] In "Dilemma of Determinism" (1884), James separates intellectual, moral, and practical needs. In the *Principles* (1890), James asserts the following:

> [t]hat theory will be most generally believed which, besides offering us objects able to account satisfactorily for our sensible experience, also offers those which are most interesting, those which appeal most urgently to our æsthetic, emotional, and active needs (1890, PP 2: 941).

And as late as *Pluralistic Universe* (1909), he suggests that there are intellectual, practical, moral, and aesthetic needs which must be met by our conceptions of the universe (1909, PU: 55).

One constant in these various expressions is that there is (at least) an intellectual and a practical component to finding the world to be a rational place. The intellectual way of grasping the world is what philosophers would typically understand as rationality. This involves our capacity to use our logical and theoretical reason to discern general truths about reality. However, focusing solely on this aspect of our natures would be to perform a kind of philosophical mistake, which James usually calls "vicious intellectualism".[5] We fall into this mistake when we assume that only the intellectual sides of our natures require satisfaction when formulating our philosophical world-view, and that a solely theoretical or logical account would be sufficient for our philosophical project of finding the world to be rational. Though an entirely intellectualistic account of the world might satisfy academic philosophers, who are particularly sensitive to this part of our nature, a philosophy which satisfied only our intellectual natures would at best become "the creed of some partial sect". More well-rounded human beings, and thus the general drift of human experience, would reject such an account as unsatisfactory in the long-run (1881, WB: 100).

This was, in fact, one of the central and repeated criticisms James levelled against his favourite adversaries, the Absolute idealists. James saw himself and the idealists as embarked on the same philosophical project of creating a rational account of the

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[4] See Appendix II in *The Will to Believe* (1882, WB: 427).
[5] See 1909, PU: 32.

universe. But the idealists interpreted this project as being responsive only to our intellectual need. As such, they produced philosophical accounts in which our only task was to contemplate or discover an already complete and unified reality.[6] On these accounts our practical engagement with reality is seen as meaningful only insofar as it furthers our intellectual comprehension of the universe. James's argument against the idealist is that their theory is insufficient, because it privileges one type of human need at the expense of the others, and as a result produces a less than fully rational account of the world. Strange as it might seem to the idealist, James's assertion is that a world which was already perfectly complete, unified, and finished would be profoundly alienating to most human agents, precisely because our practical natures could find no satisfaction within it.[7]

To understand this claim, we need a better account of what it is for our practical natures to find satisfaction. According to James, we contradict our "active propensities" when we give them no "object whatever to press against". In order to exercise our practical natures, we need to have the *power* and the *motive* to act. The power to act simply means the capacity to perform free actions. The motive to act requires that our actions be seen to have some "relevancy in universal affairs", so that acting under the impulses, ideals, and faiths which we "most cherish" can have some real effect in a world outside of our subjective feeling.[8] A nightmare is a situation in which we have motive, but no power to act. The Absolute idealist presents the opposite, and allows us the power to act, but removes all motive. If we truly held that the universal was already complete and finished

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[6] See (1880, WB: 180; 1881, WB: 137; 1882, WB: 62-3; 1882, WB: 196ff.; 1910, SPP: 111).

[7] I have elsewhere written extensively on this argument of James's against the Absolute idealists. See Stern and Williams (forthcoming). However, James levelled similar criticisms against deterministic materialists, such as Spencer. James's notion that any ultimately satisfying philosophy must give a place to the free exercise of practical human nature is at work throughout much of James's work and, some critics argue, was of central importance to his personal life. Kuklick points out that James went through periods of depression in his younger years, related to this deterministic angst:

> Part of the cause of what today might be diagnosed as clinical depression was his intellectual puzzlement over evolution. Cogitating over the atheistic interpretations of Darwin, James feared that evolution might rule out any spiritual interpretation of human life and reduce people to organisms determined by forces beyond their control. The popular philosophic answer of absolute idealism did not attract him, since for James it too entailed determinism and precluded genuine freedom. If either speculative system were true, work in the world was useless (Kuklick, 2001: 150).

It was this need to see individual human effort as meaningful that drove much of James's criticisms of absolute idealism and reductive materialism.

[8] See VI.1.2-3.

(either by God, the Absolute, or by physical laws), we would lose all motivation, because nothing that we did would contribute to the outcome of the world (1882, WB: 70-71).

For these reasons, James needs to assert an account in which we do not simply apprehend pre-existing truths about the world, but are partially required to *contribute* to the reality we are cognising. As he famously puts it:

> I, for my part, cannot escape the consideration, forced upon me at every turn, that the knower is not simply a mirror floating with no foot-hold anywhere, and passively reflecting an order that he comes upon and finds simply existing. The knower is an actor, and co-efficient of the truth on one side, whilst on the other he registers the truth which he helps to create. Mental interests, hypotheses, postulates, so far as they are bases for human action—action which to a great extent transforms the world—help to make the truth which they declare. (1878, EPh: 21)

Without such a role for our practical natures, any account of philosophy will present an account of the universe which is irrational. [9]

§1.2 THE ATROCIOUS HARMLESSNESS OF ALL THINGS

There must be real work for us to do in the world if our practical, and not just our intellectual, natures are to find satisfaction. A world which was finished and complete would be a world to which our actions could contribute nothing, and in which we would have no motivation to act. Similarly, a world in which all of our ideals were already realised would be a world in which much of the significance of human life would be lost. As James puts it in "Dilemma", "[n]ot the absence of vice, but vice there, and virtue holding her by the throat, seems to be the ideal human state" (1884, WB; 131).

It is for this reason, in his paper "Is Life Worth Living?" (1895), that James rejects a certain form of theistic ethics. For an ethics which postulates an omnipotent and benevolent

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[9] It is worth noting that James is open to the possibility that the universe will not meet our standards of rationality. It would well be that on a long enough time frame we find that the universe is not conducive to the satisfaction of one of our needs. Scientific inquiry might reveal aspects of the world which are simply not conducive to being understood. Moral inquiry might end with the discovery that the universe is simply not conducive to being interpreted morally. We might discover that we do, in fact, exist in a deterministic universe which would make both our practical and our moral natures ineffectual. But until such a time as we reach this as a stable conclusion, we should assume the opposite. Failure to do so would be to invite a sense of *unheimlichkeit*, accept pessimism, and would prevent us from embarking on an inquiry which might reveal the opposite to be true.

creator, the existence of evil poses a serious problem. Many of these theistic accounts attempt to explain away such evil by suggesting that from a "Gods-eye view", evil is either illusory or a necessary but minor feature of His perfect creation. According to James, however, such an account fails to satisfy us from our imperfect, mortal perspective, where experienced evils seem very real indeed. Making evil either illusory or necessary in this way means we can do nothing to combat it, and this engenders a sense of despair or resignation. Once we accept a secular view, however, then we see evil as something concrete which can be overcome through our own efforts. In fact, it is in overcoming such evils that human beings most often feel their lives to be significant:

> [i]t is, indeed, a remarkable fact that sufferings and hardships do not, as a rule, abate the love of life; they seem, on the contrary, usually to give it a keener zest [...] Need and struggle are what excite and inspire us [...] The history of our own race is one long commentary on the cheerfulness that comes with fighting ills (1895, WB: 45).

A world-view which admits the reality of concrete evils is thus practically superior to one which explains away such evils as a spiritual necessity or a mirage. Concrete evils can be discovered and fought against, and give us motivation for meaningful action. [10]

However, this view of human nature may lead James into problems of his own. James often appears sympathetic to an extreme form of this view, in which any world where our concrete problems were actually solved would be one which was intolerable to our practical natures.

An obvious example is his treatment of the "Chautauqua Institution". The institution, located beside Chautauqua Lake, was a kind of middle-class summer resort, where people could stay to enjoy the countryside, sports activities, live music, lectures from prominent scholars, sermons, and other "superfluous higher wants of man". James stayed at the institution in 1896, and saw it as "a foretaste of what human society might be, were it all in the light, with no suffering and no dark corners". It was, in short, a "middle-class paradise, without sin, without a victim, without a blot, without a tear" (1899, TT: WB: 152). Nonetheless, upon leaving this apparent utopia, James was surprised to feel a great sense of relief. Reflecting on this feeling, James found that:

> [t]his order is too tame, this culture too second-rate, this goodness too uninspiring. This human drama without villain or a pang; this community so refined that ice-cream soda water is the utmost offering it can make to the brute animal in man; this city simmering in the tepid lakeside sun; this atrocious harmlessness of all things – I cannot abide

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[10] James does conclude, in this essay, that a sensible and pragmatic religion in which a (finite) God required our support and action in order to improve the world would be the best possible world-view, precisely because it would allow us to expend more effort to actualise ideals in a more diverse array of circumstances (1895, WB: 55; See VI.3.8; VI.4).

with them. Let me take my chances again in the big outside worldly wilderness with all its sins and sufferings. There are the heights and depths, the precipices and the steep ideals, the gleams of the awful and the infinite; and there is more hope and help a thousand times than in this dead level and quintessence of every mediocrity (1899, TT: 152-3).

The problem with Chautauqua Lake was, for James, that there was no possibility of danger, challenge, effort, or struggle: "[s]uch absence of human nature *in extremis* [...] seemed, then, a sufficient explanation for Chautauqua's flatness and lack of zest" (1899, TT: 154).[11]

The distaste which James felt towards Chautauqua Lake was anticipated somewhat in his "Dilemma of Determinism" paper (1884). There, whilst sympathetically presenting what he took to be the positive features of subjectivism, he states that:

> Everyone must at some time have wondered at that strange paradox of our moral nature, that, though the pursuit of outward good is the breath of its nostrils, the attainment of outward good would seem to be its suffocation and death. Why does the painting of any paradise or Utopia, in heaven or on earth, awaken such yawnings for nirvana and escape? […] We look upon them from this delicious mess of insanities and realities, strivings and deadnesses, hopes and fears, agonies and exultations, which forms our present state, and *tedium vitæ* is the only sentiment they awaken in our breasts. […] If *this* be the whole fruit of the victory, we say; if the generations of mankind suffered and laid down their lives; if prophets confessed and martyrs sang in the fire, and all the sacred tears were shed for no other end than that a race of creatures of such unexampled insipidity should succeed, and protract *in sæcula sæculorum* their contented and inoffensive lives—why, at such a rate, better lose than win the battle, or at all events better ring down the curtain before the last act of the play, so that a business that began so importantly may be saved from so singularly flat a winding-up (1884, WB: 130).

James here presents the "paradox" of our practical natures. Striving for a better world gives our lives meaning, but the achievement of this world is unsatisfying to those doing the striving. Attaining moral stability appears to be conflated, on such a view, with

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[11] In a letter to his wife, Alice G. James, in July 1896, James describes his longing

> to escape from tepidity. Even an armenian massacre, whether to be killer or killed, would seem an agreeable change from the blamelessness of Chautauqua as she lies soaking year after year in her lake side sun and shower. Man wants to be *stretched* to his utmost, if not in one way than in another (1896, CWJ 8:583).

Chautauqua failed to "stretch" or challenge human nature. As a vision of a possible future for the human race, it was thus uninspiring.

attaining practical stagnancy. In this way, the whole notion of moral progress, or meliorism, to which James is committed is called into question.

However, in both of these essays James offers a potential solution to this "paradox" in our practical natures. In "Is Life Worth Living?" he does so by appealing to a particular account of significance. And in "Dilemma" he does so by advocating realism and pluralism. Let us take a look at each in turn,

The solution to the "paradox" which James offers in "Is Life Worth Living?" involves arguing that the nature of human significance does not change depending on context:

> [t]he solid meaning of life is always the same eternal thing – the marriage, namely, of some unhabitual ideal, however special, with some fidelity, courage, and endurance; with some man's or woman's pains. – And whatever or wherever life may be, there will always be the chance for that marriage to take place (1895, WB: 166).

The essential point is that the significance of human life is realised when a novel ideal is united with the effort required to realise that ideal. This is James's (subjective) notion of "progress" (1895, WB: 164; V.2.2). Seeing as, whatever world we find ourselves in, there will always be room for such a "marriage", then whatever world we exist in (even one such as Chautauqua Lake) will be one in which we are capable of finding our lives to be meaningful. Particular types of significant lives (such as a life spent battling against the elements) might be removed from possibility, but new types of significant lives (such as a life spent battling for justice in courtrooms) emerge.

The problem with *this* solution is that, despite James's use of the word, it rejects the possibility of real moral progress. James admits that on such a view, though society changes over time towards some "newer and better equilibrium", nonetheless this makes no "*genuine vital difference* [...] to the lives of our decedents". Living a genuinely meaningful and significant life is open to any person in any context. It would take a "presumptuous calculator" to suggest with any certainty that the "total sum of significances is positively and absolutely greater at any one epoch" (1895, WB: 166-7). However, in taking away any real concept of moral progress, James has taken away a real motivation for acting for the amelioration of the world. In fact, if the world does not fundamentally change, regardless of what ideals are or are not realised within it, then we either fall into the pessimism which James was attempting to avoid (seeing as no practical efforts on our part will improve the world), or fall into the subjectivism and dogmatism he was trying to avoid (seeing as all that matters is that *our* ideal is realised).[12]

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[12] Indeed, this solution does not seem Jamesian at all. If we accept this answer, then James's point against the Absolute idealist is more or less conceded. If our practical natures can find purpose in any possible world, no matter how complete or finished, then there is nothing wrong with the

The solution which James attempts in "Dilemma" shows more promise. There James focuses on his view that reality is indeterministic, and that our voluntary conduct determines which possibilities are actualised. Of the various possibilities available for our voluntary consent, some are really significant, and others are not. This involves pluralism (there are numerous real possibilities and real goods) and realism (there are right and wrong ways to go about realising these goods). The possibility of really contributing to the betterment of the universe (or failing to), is what gives our life significance:

> [w]hat interest, zest, or excitement can there be in achieving the right way, unless we are enabled to feel that the wrong way is also a possible and a natural way—nay, more, a menacing and an imminent way? And what sense can there be in condemning ourselves for taking the wrong way, unless we need have done nothing of the sort, unless the right way was open to us as well? I cannot understand the willingness to act, no matter how we feel, without the belief that acts are really good and bad. I cannot understand the belief that an act is bad, without regret at its happening. I cannot understand regret without the admission of real, genuine possibilities in the world. Only *then* is it other than a mockery to feel, after we have failed to do our best, that an irreparable opportunity is gone from the universe, the loss of which it must forever after mourn (1884, WB: 135).

Rather than a (subjectivist) account of progress, James here adopts a realist conception. It is the notion of *really* contributing to the amelioration of the world which gives our lives significance, not merely acting to bring about a *subjective* ideal. Our actions or inactions on real possibilities are responsible for goods being realised or not. There is always the possibility that any progress we have made might slip backwards, and there is always the tendency for novel ideals to arise which challenge the current stability. In James's "pluralistic, restless universe", we will never reach a stage in which our actions are no longer required to bring about or to preserve moral progress (1884, WB: 136).

There is a subsequent problem to such a solution, however. On such an account, our work is never complete, and we are never allowed to rest easy. As James himself sees it, this is the biggest weakness of his position. James often states that his brand of pluralist ethics is only suitable for the "healthy-minded", who feel energised by the thought of challenge and struggle. For those of a "morbid" or "sickly-minded" disposition,

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intellectualist position the idealists represent (§1.1; see Stern and Williams, forthcoming). James himself admits that his solution here is unsatisfactory, in that it omits a "certain qualification in which I myself believe", and that his main purpose was just to show that "no outward changes of condition in life can keep the nightingale of its eternal meaning from singing in all sorts of different men's hearts" (1895, WB: 167).

however, such an appeal to their own efforts might cause despair. As James puts it in his introduction to his father's literary remains:

> Apart from analytic and intellectual arguments, pluralism is a view to which we all practically incline when in the full and successful exercise of our moral energy. The life we then feel tingling through us vouches sufficiently for itself, and nothing tempts us to refer it to a higher source. [...] Any absolute moralism must needs be [...] a healthy-minded pluralism; and in a pluralistic philosophy the healthy-minded moralist will always feel himself at home [...] But healthy-mindedness is not the whole of life; and the *morbid* view, as one by contrast may call it, asks for a philosophy very different from that of absolute moralism. To suggest personal will and effort to one "all sicklied o'er" with the sense of weakness, of helpless failure, and of fear, is to suggest the most horrible of things to him. What he craves is to be consoled in his very impotence, to feel that the Powers of the Universe recognize and secure him, all passive and failing as he is. Well, we are all *potentially* such sick men. The sanest and best of us are of one clay with lunatics and prison-inmates (1884, ERM: 61-62).

A realist pluralism of the sort James advocates is suitable for healthy-minded natures, those who want to roll up their sleeves and get to work, but the idea that the amelioration of the universe is dependent on their own efforts is anathema to people who require a sense of stability for their mental well-being. This stability can be provided by absolute idealism or religious accounts of morality, but not by James's pluralistic realism.

James returns to this distinction in *Pragmatism*, where he suggests that absolutist and religious world-views give us license to take "moral holidays", on the assumption that the world is in "better hands than ours" (1907, P: 42; see P: 43-44; 57; 140ff). Similarly, in "The Absolute and the Strenuous Life" (1906), James recognises that as a result of the pluralist view that the

> world is always vulnerable, for some part may go astray; and having no "eternal" edition of it to draw comfort from, its partisan must always feel to some degree insecure (1906, ERM: 123-4).

Nonetheless, despite this insecurity, the pluralistic view offers serious benefits over the absolutistic or religious view. Though absolutism is consistent with the adoption of the strenuous mood, the pluralistic world-view *demands* that we adopt it, on the grounds that our efforts are necessary for the amelioration of the world. As such, pluralism allies itself with the kinds of virtues which we outlined in the previous chapter (VI.3.9). Though it allows moral holidays only as "provisional breathing-spells", pluralism embraces fallibility, insecurity, a reliance on other people, and the notion of moral inquiry and the search for truth. Absolutism might allow for moral holidays, but it tends to encourage either "tyrannical" emotions or fatalistic moods, which can prevent moral

inquiry. Nonetheless, James admits that absolutism's capacity to support the sick-minded is a benefit for the absolutist, and its failure to do so is a deficiency of the pluralist position (1906, ERM: 124-5).[13]

§1.3 FAITHS, IDEALS AND RISK

Before we look at the core of James's "Will to Believe" thesis, and how it relates to his moral philosophy as a whole, we need to clarify some key vocabulary. This section aims to understand the differences and similarities between beliefs, ideals, and faiths. It also aims to indicate the ways in which each of these things come with a certain kind of risk.

We have seen that James is clear that "believing" and "willing" are essentially the same psychological and phenomenological state (§V.4). It is the external context, rather than some property of the state itself, which determines the difference. I have suggested that this commonality should be understood in terms of them both being *affirmations* of some reality. To affirm something in this sense requires consenting to the reality of some object and acting appropriately towards it.

The main difference between a belief and an instance of willing is that a belief finds its object already connected within a wider context of objective facts and relations, whereas the object of an instance of willing does not. As we have seen, something having objective reality just is a matter of it being related to other features of reality in the right way (IV.4.3). This is what James meant when he said that it is "nature" which makes the object of our belief real (1890, PP 2: 948; V.4; VI.2.1). Because of this connection, my belief in an object will, if correct, lead me through a series of experiential relations to a direct acquaintance of that object. This is James's theory of reference and truth (see 1909, MT: 128; IV.2). The statement "I believe in *x*" means that I affirm a reality (*x*), which I take to be already supported by a wider context of experiential objects and their relations, such that were I act on my idea of *x*, I would be lead to a direct acquaintance with it or its immediate surroundings, or otherwise be put into a better working relationship with that portion of reality. An object of will, on the other hand, only has *potential* relations with a wider objective reality (IV.1.5). It will require some work on my part, and perhaps

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[13] Never one to let a good middle-ground go unexplored, the later James expresses the idea of a "pluralistic" or "pragmatic" religion, in which a finite God is an ally of ours, but who does not guarantee, by himself and without our efforts, the success of the good (1907, P: 143-4; 1909, PU: 54-55). Though James does not think this will satisfy the truly sick-soul, this middle-ground will be found satisfying to most ordinary persons with a religious demand, and will avoid the other problems of absolutism (1907, P: 144).

on the part of others, to make those potential relations *actual*. Saying "I will *x*" means that I affirm a reality (*x*) which I will act to bring into objective relation with a wider context of experiential objects and their relations. It is not (just) nature which makes the object of my willing real, but also my actions.

An "ideal" is something which we find to be significant, and which we think *ought* to be realised. Ideals are still "affirmations". They consent to the reality of some object and hold that it *ought* to be realised (V.2.1). This stance is consistent with the object already being real (in objective relations with other objects), or with the object being merely potential. If we hold our ideal fully, then we must be motivated to act under it in appropriate circumstances (V.2.3). When our ideal is not realised in the objective world, then the appropriate action will involve acting to bring about the realisation of our ideal. If our ideal is already realised, then the appropriate action might be maintaining, preserving, or improving their objects. The ideal of a national health service, for instance, has been realised in the UK, but requires being maintained, protected from its detractors, and improved so that the realisation better reflects the ideal.

A "faith" is similar to an ideal, and lies somewhere between willing and believing. James defines faith as "belief in something concerning which doubt is still theoretically possible" (1882, WB: 76). So, the object of our faith is something which we *believe*, which means that we hold it to *already* be realised, and in actual connection with other objects of our experience. But we have not yet confirmed or proved this to be true. In this sense, a faith is very similar to an hypothesis. It is a belief-like state, upon which we act, which aims for verification, but which we have not yet verified. In fact, James often tells us that faith is "synonymous with working hypothesis" (1882, WB: 79; see 1877, EPh: 29; 337). The main differences between a "faith" seen as an hypothesis, and a particular *scientific* hypothesis, is the scale and existential importance of the hypothesis in question. James generally reserves "faith" to refer to an hypothesis which concerns how we relate to the universe as a whole, how we relate to other people, our belief in our own capacities, or some other belief of great importance to our personal lives. The truth or falsity of an individual scientific hypothesis, on the other hand, rarely has import outside of a particular theoretical inquiry.

Both faiths and ideals are linked with possibility. When we act on an established belief, we have good reason for expecting that future experiences will support and confirm that belief. When we act on faiths, on the other hand, then "possibilities, not finished facts, are the realities with which we have actively to deal" (1895, WB: 55). In this sense, faiths are risky things. Like any unproven hypothesis, we act under them at risk of being shown to be incorrect. And like any hypothesis, we must act under them in order to have access to their falsity or validity. *Unlike* hypotheses in scientific inquiry, however, what we risk is much greater. What we risk being wrong about is nothing less than the meaning of our lives and the world, what is right and wrong, or what is significant and

what is not. We are staking our very "life and character upon the throw" (1891, WB: 156; VI.3.5). Faith is the "readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified in advance" (1882, WB: 76). It is in this sense that James links faith with courage (ibid, see 1895, WB: 56; §3.8).[14] He also links acting under these risky faiths and ideals with the significance of human life, for the familiar reason that if their outcome were guaranteed in advance, then our actions and efforts would not be meaningful (§1.2).[15]

Like any affirmative state or hypothesis, faith is directed at the world and requires satisfaction or verification. It needs to be realised. It actively aims to find evidence for its validity. But James, as we will see in the next section, is not always clear about the ways in which faith can find this satisfaction. In some cases, faith finds its satisfaction by *bringing about* the state of affairs which count as its satisfaction. In other cases, faith is required to *discover* the state of affairs which count as its satisfaction. In the former case, faith looks more like willing. In the latter case, faith looks more like believing.[16]

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[14] Talisse and Hester express this well when they define faith as the "willingness to act earnestly in pursuit of a fallible and revisable ideal" (Talisse and Hester, 2004: 73).

[15] It is clear that James's philosophical position here also reflects a personal attitude, expressed in the following letter to his then fiancé, later wife, Alice Gibbons:

> I have often thought that the best way to define a man's character, would be to seek out the particular mental or moral attitude, in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active & alive. At such moments there is a voice inside which speaks & says "*this* is the real me!." And afterwards, considering the circumstances in which the man is placed, and noting how some of them are fitted to evoke this attitude whilst others do not call for it, an outside observer may be able to prophecy where the man may fail, where succeed, where be happy & where miserable. Now as well as I can describe it, this characteristic attitude in me always involves an element of active tension, of holding my own as it were, & trusting outward things to perform their part so as to make it a full harmony, but without any guarantee that they will. Make it a guarantee, - and the attitude immediately becomes to my consciousness stagnant and stingless. Take away the guarantee, and I feel […] a sort of deep enthusiastic bliss, of bitter willingness to do and suffer anything, which translates itself physically by a kind of stinging pain inside of my breast-bone (don't smile at this—it is to me an essential element of the whole thing!) and which, although it is a mere mood or emotion to which I can give no form in words, authenticates itself to me as the deepest principle of all active & theoretic determination, which I possess (Letter to Alice Gibbons, 1877, CWJ4: 570-1).

This accords with James's meta-philosophical theory that theoretical philosophy stems from personal sources (e.g. 1909, PU: 10).

[16] James consistently holds his position that faiths are to be considered akin to hypotheses throughout his life. For instance, in an appendix to his unfinished *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1910), James writes that:

The exact relation between faiths and ideals is interesting. In his 1895-1903 notes on "Faith", James offers a somewhat unclear description of their connection. There James indicates that we have a right to adopt a faith in *x* when the reality of *x* is required for our ideals to be realised. The person who denies that faith has any role in our intellectual or practical lives, then, is constrained to deny "the legitimacy of this commerce between the ideal and the actual", and so deny that our ideals *can* effect a wider reality (1895-1903, MEN: 310). Obvious examples of faiths which we are required to adopt in order for us to act under our ideals include a faith in free will, a faith that the world can be improved, a faith in the possibility of improving the world through our own actions, and so on. If we are going to act under our ideals, we need to believe in these things, despite doubt about them still being possible. Indeed, we cannot confirm the truth of these faiths *until* we act under our ideals. If we consistently fail to satisfactorily realise our ideals, this might be an indication that some of our faiths are invalid.

§1.4 THE WILL TO BELIEVE

James's "will-to-believe" position is most prominently presented in his 1896 essay of the same name, but he defended some version of this thesis throughout his career. His position is a complex one, open to misunderstanding, and still subject to intense scholarly debate.[17] In this section my aim is not to mount a defence of James's will-to-believe position, but simply to explore those aspects of it which are vital for understanding his ethics. I shall focus on two features: his argument for the right to adopt certain beliefs on faith, in advance of sufficient evidential support; and his (separable) argument that adopting certain beliefs in this fashion can contribute to their truth.

The primary targets of the first aspect of James's "will-to-believe" argument are evidentialists such as William Kingdon Clifford. Cliffordian evidentialists believe that any belief adopted on faith is epistemically irresponsible and illegitimate. As Clifford famously puts it, "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything

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> [t]he long run of experience may weed out the more foolish faiths. Those who held them will then have failed: but without the wiser faiths of the others the world could have never been perfected (1910: 117).

James is here clearly applying his notion of pragmatic inquiry to faiths.
[17] See Klein (2015a) and Misak (2015) for the most recent additions.

upon insufficient evidence" (W. K. Clifford, 1877: 295; quoted by James at 1896, WB:18).[18] In contrast, James argues that we have a right to adopt certain beliefs on "passional" grounds, when intellectual or empirical evidence is not decisive (1896, WB: 13-14).[19]

Few scholars have examined precisely what James means by "passional" here, and he is not himself overly clear. What *is* clear is that "passional" factors are not reducible to mere desires that something be the case. James appears to include hopes, prejudices, needs, cultural inheritances, and other non-rational aspects of our "willing" nature which can come to make us see some possible hypothesis as "alive or dead" (1896, WB; 18).[20] As James treats "passional" nature and "willing" nature as practically synonymous, we can assume that James is here referring to those aspects of our nature (other than intellectual considerations) which adduce us to attend and consent to one possibility for belief rather than another (1896, WB: 18; V.3.1).

James calls beliefs that we adopt on faith in this way "hypotheses", which fits with his previous definition of faith as a working hypothesis (1882, WB: 79; §1.3). An hypothesis must have three features, beyond its not being currently decidable on intellectual or evidential grounds, to be a legitimate candidate for adoption: it must be live, forced, and momentous. The *liveness* of an hypothesis is measured by a person's capacity to hold an hypothesis as plausible and be motivated by it. Both personal and cultural influences are at work in determining whether or not an hypothesis is live for a particular individual. An hypothesis is *forced* (as contrasted with "avoidable") if we cannot avoid adopting a position one way or another. Refusing to believe *x*, in such cases, is the same as believing *not-x*. [21] Finally, an hypothesis is *momentous* (as opposed to trivial) if it has some significant practical importance to the person adopting the belief, if the option represents

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[18] In fact, Clifford held not only that it was *epistemically* wrong to adopt beliefs on insufficient evidential grounds, but also that it was *morally* wrong. This is because he holds that beliefs have pragmatic entailments, such that no belief is ever isolated to one individual, and no belief is ever completely severed from action. We are to be held responsible for our beliefs in the sense that they partially determine the beliefs and actions of people around us, and those of the next generation. As such, Clifford held that every person had a "universal" "duty to mankind" to believe in proportion to evidence (W. K. Clifford, 1877: 291-293).

[19] James often attributed his will-to-believe insight to the work of the French philosopher Charles Renouvier. In a letter to Peirce, he suggests that he "cribbed" the whole essay from Renouvier (1897, CWJ8: 324). See Dunham (2015) for an examination of the similarities and influences between Renouvier and James.

[20] Thus, our passional natures are primary factors in some hypothesis appearing "live" to us, in a way that will be explained shortly. See Jackman (1999: 7) for one account of "passional" grounds in terms of liveness.

[21] As James puts it elsewhere, in forced cases, "the universe will have no neutrals". James thinks belief in a deity is such a forced case, seeing as refusing to adopt the belief is the same as not believing. Agnosticism is, in all practical behaviours, identical with atheism, and so for the pragmatist it is an identical belief. Similarly, "[s]cepticism in moral matters" is often "an active ally" to, and so pragmatically indistinguishable from, immorality (1882, WB: 89).

a unique situation, or if the choice is irreversible (1896, WB: 14-15). Momentousness should be linked with *significance* in the sense previously explored (V.3.1).

We can flesh out the notion of "liveness" by appealing to the vocabulary introduced in previous chapters of this thesis. An option is *live* if it has actual or possible relations with the world of facts and relations which we already take to be real. James tells us, for instance, that being a Christian or not is a live choice for him, whereas the choice to be a Muslim is not live. Christianity was an option which has real objective support in the world that James inhabited. The community he lived in, and his own system of beliefs, already contained several potential connections which supported his adoption of the Christian hypothesis. On the other hand, as James puts it:

> If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi, the notion makes no electric connection with your nature – it refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all. As an hypothesis it is completely dead (1896, WB: 14).

Another way of talking about the liveness of a belief is using the language of James's faith-ladder. A live hypothesis is *fit* to be true (V.4). This is essentially the same thing as talking about actual or potential connections. Something being fit to be true in this sense means that it "fits" with the other things we hold to be true. Consenting and attending to such a live option would lead to full belief in way that attending to a dead option would not.[22]

Alongside these criteria, James introduces two epistemic "imperatives" or norms which govern our belief adoption. One imperative tells us to "believe truth", and the other tells us to "shun error". Different personal temperaments will weigh these imperatives differently, and particular inquiries will rightly privilege one over the other. Natural science rightly encourages us to put our emphasis on avoiding error, precisely because we have no pressing reason to decide on what to believe prior to assessing all of the evidence. As James puts it,

> [w]henever the option between losing truth and gaining it is not momentous, we can throw the chance of *gaining truth* away, and at any rate save ourselves from any chance of *believing falsehood* (1896, WB: 25).

When nothing significant to us is at stake, we rightly take the "dispassionately judicial intellect" as our ideal. However, when something significant *is* at stake, then we have the right to adopt an hypothesis on passional grounds (1896, WB: 27).

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[22] Southworth (2016) is the only commenter I know of who has connected the liveness of a hypothesis with its capacity to be consented to as real. According to Southworth, "the possibility exists in these situations of conflict [will-to-believe situations] for the individual to attend to particular feelings of reality, and through effort and volition, work towards fully believing" (2016: 67).

Through these ideas, James fairly precisely delineates the type of cases in which it is legitimate to adopt on faith a belief for which we currently have insufficient evidence. When an hypothesis is undecided on intellectual or empirical grounds, and it is *live*, *forced* and *momentous*, then we are permitted to follow the imperative to "believe truth", and so adopt "at our own risk" any hypothesis which is live enough to "tempt our will" (1896, WB: 32). The risk James speaks of here is the risk of believing and personally investing in something which will later be shown to be false. But by choosing *not* to adopt a belief, then we are also taking the risk that we prevent ourselves from knowing the truth. It is important to note that in *both* cases we decide on passional grounds. Even the decision *not* to believe is made on the basis of a "preponderant private horror of becoming a dupe". Thus, the Cliffordian evidentialist is like "a general informing his soldiers that it is better to keep out of the battle forever than to risk a single wound" (1896, WB: 25). Were we always to follow the imperative to "shun error" at all costs, then we would never risk a novel hypothesis, and we would never discover new knowledge. The epistemic norms must be kept in appropriate balance if good inquiry is to flourish.

This attack on (strict) evidentialism might leave us suspecting that James allows us to hold certain beliefs, especially religious beliefs, regardless of their relation to evidence.[23] However, James's decision to describe faiths as "working hypotheses" should show us that he is not suggesting that such beliefs are indifferent to evidence or verification, or that we should hold such beliefs to be uncriticisable or non-falsifiable. In fact, James is quite clear throughout his essay that he holds that religious, metaphysical, and other hypotheses adopted in this way must be subject to evidence in just the same way as scientific beliefs. As James puts it in the preface to *Will to Believe:*

> If religious hypotheses about the universe be in order at all, then the active faiths of individual in them, freely expressing themselves in life, are the experimental tests by which they are verified, and the only means by which their truth or falsehood can be wrought out. The truest scientific hypothesis is that which, as we say, "works best"; and it can be no otherwise with religious hypotheses (1897, WB: 8).

According to James, all hypotheses are tested in future experience for validity. The difference in will-to-believe cases is that they are adopted and acted under in *advance* of

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[23] Kucklick (1977), for instance, interprets James's pragmatism as a form of fideism (1977: xx). Nathanson (1982) goes further, suggesting that James argues for non-evidential reasons to adopt certain beliefs even when there is evidence to suggest they are false (1982: 577). Gale (1999) seems to agree, suggesting that we can be justified in believing metaphysical or religious hypotheses due to the "beneficial consequences of so believing" (1999: 93), even in "the teeth of quite powerful contrary evidence" (1999: 100). As such, the will-to-believe doctrine would allow us to believe whatever we wanted, regardless of evidence, if it mattered enough to us. If Nathanson and Gale are correct, it would be disastrous, not only because this is a very problematic view, but because this was precisely the kind of problematic interpretation of the will-to-believe thesis that James vehemently denied.

evidence, whereas in (most) scientific cases, we withhold our consent until all the evidence is in. In a certain sense, then, we might see James as a kind of evidentialist.[24]

It is worth making some distinctions here. *Any* science will require us to adopt hypotheses on passional grounds and in advance of evidence. We can distinguish between two types of case: foundational hypotheses and particular hypotheses. Foundational hypotheses are those which must be adopted to make inquiry possible at all. In natural science, for instance, we must adopt the belief that there is some truth to be had about whatever phenomena we are investigating; that through our actions we can uncover that truth; that nature demonstrates the requisite kind of uniformity; and so on. Belief in these foundational hypotheses is always adopted on the basis of "a passionate affirmation of desire", and not on the basis of intellectual or empirical evidence (1896, WB: 19). As such the foundational hypotheses of any science are held on faith.[25] Particular hypotheses are hypotheses which are entertained *within* a science. These too often emerge as a result of passional factors. "Hardly a law has been established in science", James tells us, "which was not first sought after […] to gratify an inner need" (1895, WB: 51). Nonetheless, these particular hypotheses need not be *believed* in a full sense. Most of the particular hypotheses of natural sciences, for instance, will and should be held tentatively. When faced with an option between two conflicting

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[24] An "evidentialist" reading of James is not unique. Weintraub (2003) thinks that, despite James's attack on Clifford, that he should read as a kind of evidentialist (2003: 108), though she holds that this evidentialism fails in the case of religious beliefs (2003: 115). Welchman argues that James should be read as advocating a form of auto-experimentation, where the agent is both test-subject and researcher (2006: 234). This is perhaps closest to my reading of James (cf. §2). Aikin (2014) rejects both defences of Jamesian evidentialism, though he is not fully clear why (2014: 198n8). Aikin himself holds that James's argument supports a certain kind of evidentialist reading, but that this goes against the aims of James himself who, on Aikin's reading, is supposed to be defending faith *against* the evidentialist (Aikin, 2014: 153). Thus, James's evidentialism is taken by Aikin to be accidental, and a failure of his non-evidentialist account. Misak holds that James is an evidentialist who extends the notion of evidence to include the satisfaction of the believer as evidence, a notion which she holds to be "something any evidentialist will be loathe to accept" (Misak, 2013: 63). Slater (2009) thinks that James holds a "pragmatic version of evidentialism" (2009: 54) in which we "we put ourselves in a position to confirm or disconfirm the truth of […] beliefs only by choosing and attempting to live by them" (Slater, 2009: 45). I broadly agree with Slater's view, though Slater also seems to hold that metaphysical and religious views "cannot be empirically tested" (2014: 175), so it is unclear how we are to confirm or disconfirm the truth of them on his account. Finally, Jackman (1999) denies evidentialist readings, but holds that James's "naturalised epistemology" broadens the notion of epistemic rationality so that "prudential reasons" are "part of what determines just what epistemic rationality should be" (1999: 18). I find Jackman's position persuasive, but it is unclear in what way James is not an evidentialist on his lights. Either a belief's working is to be taken as a mark of truth, and so James is a kind of evidentialist, or prudential reasons are held to legitimate our beliefs, and James falls into the kind of subjectivism which Misak accuses him of.

[25] As such, general scientific principles are akin to "religious faith" as James presents it (1890, PP 2: 1233).

hypotheses, "the need of acting is seldom so urgent" as to require us to make up our minds about what to believe prior to collecting sufficient evidence. The hypotheses are "hardly living", the options are "trivial" and not "forced", and so we can continue "weighing reasons *pro et contra* with an indifferent hand" until evidence is sufficient to indicate the truth of one option (1896, WB: 26). In *moral* (and religious) inquiry, however, our particular hypotheses *cannot* be held tentatively, as they *are* live, momentous, forced, and so "urgent".[26] As such, we are permitted to hold such particular moral hypotheses in the full sense of *believing* and *acting under* them, prior to evidential confirmation. Appealing to the faith ladder, we can say that this is the difference between being at the lower or the higher end of the "good-will slope" (VI.4). Nonetheless, though the *adoption* of these moral hypotheses (or "ideals") is legitimated on passional grounds, their *truth* or falsity is still held to be assessed by evidence in the long-run.[27]

So, the urgency or the practical importance of a particular hypothesis gives us one reason to adopt it in advance of evidence. But, in "The Will to Believe", James also gives us a second, and separable, reason. In certain cases, the adoption of an hypothesis (in the full

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[26] The connection between the epistemic norms which govern the natural sciences and those which govern the adoption of religious beliefs is illuminated in the current debate between Misak (2013; 2015) and Klein (2015a). Both Klein and Misak think that James holds epistemic norms to be constant between natural sciences and religious beliefs. However, according to Misak, this means that James extends the notion of "evidence" to include "the satisfaction of the believer" in such a way as to make the notion of evidence highly subjective (2015: 121; see 2013: 63). Klein agrees that James wishes to keep epistemic norms constant between the natural sciences and religious beliefs, but offers a different view. According to Klein, James's aim is to show that the methods of hypothesis adoption are constant between natural sciences and religious beliefs. He sees James's primary aim in "The Will to Believe" to be showing that both scientific and religious hypotheses are adopted on passional grounds, and maintains that "'The Will to Believe' is actually silent on the evidentialism question as it is usually construed" (Klein, 2015a: 81). My view appears to be somewhere between the two. I believe Klein is right regarding the interpretation of "The Will to Believe", and regarding the nature of hypothesis adoption, but think that James is clear elsewhere that (at least as concerns *moral* hypotheses) we test our ideas against experience, that our "active preference is a legitimate part of the game" and that their working in the long-run counts as "evidence" or "proof" of their correctness (1882, WB: 88). I disagree with Misak, however, that such an account means that the merely subjective satisfactions of believers count as evidence, as I argued in the previous chapter.

[27] My interpretation thus rejects the conventional interpretation that James *justifies* beliefs on prudential grounds. As Suckiel presents it:

> the belief in question is justified because of its prudential or moral benefits, *independently* of any appeal to adequate evidence. It is justified solely on the basis of the practical consequences of belief (Suckiel, 1894: 79-80).

This position ignores James's frequent statements regarding the hypothetic and verifiable nature of beliefs which are adopted on faith. Though the *adoption* of a hypothesis might be justified on prudential or moral grounds, the *justification* of the belief itself, like any other, rests on whether or not the course of experience continues to confirm it.

sense of belief) prior to evidence is a necessary prerequisite for attaining the evidence required for verifying that belief. Given the existence of such cases, the Cliffordian injunction to withhold belief until evidence for them was forthcoming would be an "insane logic" (1896, WB: 29).

There appear to be two kinds of cases in which faiths can bring about "their own verification" (1896, WB: 28), though James is not careful in distinguishing them. On the one hand, we have cases in which the adoption of a belief as a working hypothesis (and acting under it) is required for the *discovery* of the truth of that belief. On the other hand, there are cases in which the adoption of the belief (and acting under it) *creates* the state of affairs which verifies that hypothesis. With this in mind, we can distinguish three different relations which a belief can have to the evidence which verifies it:

> *Verification Prior to Belief* – cases in which there is enough evidence prior to the adoption of the belief to make a judgement regarding the validity of that belief.

> *Verification Posterior and Non-productive* – cases in which we need to adopt the belief prior to its verification in order to *discover* the truth or falsity of that belief.

> *Verification Posterior and Productive* – cases in which we need to adopt the belief prior to its verification because the belief helps to *bring about* its own truth or falsity.

The first type of case is what is, and should be, dominant in most scientific and practical cases. The second two cases concern specific will-to-believe type cases.

The *posterior non-productive* cases are situations in which a belief is already true or false (James would say that it was *virtually* true. See IV.1.5), but our belief and action is required to reveal the truth of that belief. James's (imperfect) example is friendship. If I would like to know whether or not you and I are friends, then I need to act in a friendly way. Only by doing so will I gain evidence regarding your demeanour towards me. If, on the other hand, I absent myself from your company and refuse to adopt a belief either way until sufficient evidence is presented, then I will put myself in a position in which I am unable to determine your friendliness one way or the other (1896, WB: 28). I need to adopt the belief before I can assess its truth.[28]

Posterior productive cases are those in which the "truths [of our beliefs] cannot become true till our faith has made them so" (1882, WB: 80). James's example of this kind of case is the chasm jumper. Faced with a chasm to jump across, I can either adopt a belief that I shall fall if I make the jump, or I can adopt the belief that I can make it across. If I adopt the latter belief, this can motivate me enough to succeed in jumping across. If I adopt the

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[28] This is an unclear example, seeing as James tell us that this instance is also possible of becoming *productive*, and so an instance of the second will-to-believe type of case: "the previous faith on my part in your liking's existence is in such cases what makes your liking come" (1896, WB: 28).

former, this might discourage me so much that I fall. In either case, the faith has contributed to the state of affairs which made it true. Faith has created its own verification not just by putting us in contact with the right experiences to validate the hypothesis, but by actively altering the world so that those experiences are possible (1882, WB: 80-81).[29]

Ideals, as particular hypotheses in moral inquiry, appear to be the kinds of things which we need to adopt belief in prior to their verification. Only when practically acting on them in the world do we gain access to evidence regarding their significance, experiences of how satisfying they are in the long-run, and so on (VI.3). In this way, our voluntary and practical natures can be seen as necessary parts in the formation and discovery of the moral universe. But James is unclear as to whether our ideals are *posterior non-productive* cases, *posterior productive* cases, or both. The failure to distinguish between these two options marks an important tension in James's ethics. If we *discover* the validity of our ideals through moral inquiry, then James appears to offer us an objective theory. However, if we *create* the validity of our ideals through moral inquiry, then James appears to offer us a subjective theory. In fact, James seems to indicate both at various points. This is a tension that I aim to resolve before the end of this chapter.

In summary, will-to-believe cases offer us concrete examples of how our faiths and ideals contribute to the universe in the way that James's philosophy requires. Adopting (foundational) hypotheses on passional grounds allows us to engage in certain inquiries, and adopting (particular) hypotheses on passional grounds can be a necessary pre-requisite to assessing their validity. Moreover, in certain cases we can *contribute* to the realisation of some live option, and so bring about the state of affairs required to assess it. Nonetheless, James's arguments in "The Will to Believe" and elsewhere leave us with a tension between the *creation* and the *discovery* of the truth of our ideals which must be overcome.

§2. CREATING THE MORAL UNIVERSE

We are now ready to address the tension which exists at the heart of James's ethics. If our contribution to and creation of the moral universe is such an important feature of our moral and practical lives, then how can we also be embarked on an objective moral inquiry? Realism in moral inquiry, as we have defined it, means the possibility of reaching conclusions which are independent of any one mind or set of minds. The

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[29] See 1895, WB: 53-4, and 1878, EPh: 24, translated at EPh: 332.

weight James puts on our individual contributions seems to prevent him from attaining this kind of objectivity.

I will start this section by looking at James's statements regarding the uniqueness of moral situations (§2.1); I will move on to James's arguments about how individuals can shape the moral landscape (§2.2); and the meliorism which James's pluralistic vision of the universe allows (§2.3). Next I will present the nature of moral progress on such a picture (§2.4); and, finally, I will give an account of how ethical inquiry and world-building can co-exist on the Jamesian model (§2.5).

§2.1 Unique Situations and Real Dilemmas

We have seen that James needs our ideals and faiths to make some real contribution to reality in order for the universe to appear rational to our practical natures (§1.1). And I have indicated that James's will-to-believe cases give us two possible kinds of interaction between our faiths or ideals and reality. Adopting and acting under a belief or ideal could be required for discovering them to be an already realised feature of the world (what I have called *posterior non-productive* cases). Or adopting and acting under a belief or ideal cold be required as a pre-requisite for bringing about their realisation (*posterior productive cases*) (§1.4). In the first case, our contribution is the act which allows us to find out more about reality. In the second case, our contribution is to the make-up of reality itself. James himself did not distinguish these cases. This is probably because in actual concrete situations in which our contribution is required, it is often quite difficult to tell what we are discovering and what we are creating.

A good example of cases in which our practical natures make some contribution to the discovery or creation of moral reality are situations in which multiple incompossible demands require realisation. Considering the amount of demands James postulates as active in any given situation, every situation we encounter will result in some demands going un-realised. Most of the time, this doesn't bother us, as the demands we customarily ignore are those we have good reason to not realise. But in situations in which novel demands feature, or situations in which two or more recognised demands are found to be incompossible, then we often have to make a conscious decision regarding which of the conflicting demands to realise. In such cases, we cannot rely on previous rules or principles to govern our decision regarding which ideals to follow. Due to the very nature of the situation, no previous rule will be adequate. As James put it in the *Principles*:

> The most characteristically and peculiarly moral judgements that a man is ever called on to make are in unprecedented cases and lonely emergencies, where no popular rhetorical maxims can avail, and the hidden oracle alone can speak; and it speaks often in favor of conduct quite unusual, and suicidal as far as gaining popular approbation goes (1890, PP 2: 1265).

"Lonely emergencies", as James calls them here, are situations in which we face some choice between goods, and we have no general rule or maxim to appeal to in making our decision. It is here that we must listen to the "hidden oracle" of our conscience or moral sensitivity and intelligence in making our decision.[30]

In choosing between demands in such a lonely emergency, we create the situation in which the validity of these demands can be assessed. Any ideal must be acted under in order for its significance to be felt, and must enter into real relations with other elements of a lived world in order for its significance to be realised. As such, the realisation of an ideal (the satisfaction of a demand) creates the situation in which the significance of that ideal or demand can be really discovered. The experiences which we must use to assess these previously hypothetical demands only come after their realisation. This does *not* mean that any demand we realise is by the fact of our realising it *made* significant or valid. The realisation of a demand may well prove its significance, and show that it fits well with other things we find valuable, that it satisfies us in the long run, and so on. But we might also find that, once realised, the demand proves itself to be unsatisfactory. The demands we failed to realise might come back to haunt us, and give us cause for real regret (1884, WB: 125-127; VI.1.2).

Any real dilemma of this sort presents a unique choice, and our decision will produce a unique outcome. As James put it:

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[30] James says something similar in "Sentiment of Rationality":

> Not that the contradiction between the two men occurs every day; in commonplace matters all moral schools agree. It is only in the lonely emergencies of life that our creed is tested: then routine maxims fail, and we fall back on our gods (1882, WB: 68).

In such emergencies, no currently existing philosophy is sufficient for making the decision. As James puts it in "Moral Philosopher":

> it is simply our total character and personal genius that are on trial, and if we invoke any so-called philosophy, our choice and use of that also are but revelations of our personal aptitude or incapacity for moral life (1891, WB: 162).

See John Wild (1965; 1969: 301-313) for an account of James's ethics which focuses solely on this aspect of personal responsibility.

> every real dilemma is in literal strictness a unique situation; and the exact combinations of ideals realized and ideals disappointed which each decision creates is always a universe without precedent, and for which no adequate previous rule exists (1891, WB: 158).

There are two points to realise here. Firstly, that every moral dilemma represents a unique situation. And secondly, that through making this decision, we create a world which is also unique. Let's take each point in turn.

A unique moral dilemma occurs when there are several incompossible ideals which could be realised, and there is no conventional rule which satisfactory tells us which to realised and which to ignore. The exact combinations of ideals and demand in play in each situation will differ every time. According to James's account, the best imaginable outcome will obviously be to realise all ideals (1891, WB: 153). But the actual world limits the number of ideals which can be realised, and features of some ideals prevent others from being realised. As James puts it:

> [t]he actually possible in this world is vastly narrower than all that is demanded; and there is always a *pinch* between the ideal and the actual which can only be got through by leaving part of the ideal behind (1891, WB: 153).

If I realise the ideal of being married, then I forgo the ideal of remaining a bachelor. If I accept the demand of one duty, then I might not be able to meet another. If our society wants to maximise the ideal of freedom, it cannot do so without limiting the ideal of security. And so on. Faced with these incompossible options, we must make a choice, and by doing so, we are realising one option at the expense of the others. In fact, James is clear that what we are doing often is choosing which of the really *possible* versions of ourselves and versions of the world we want to be *actual*.[31] Different possibilities and actualities follow from whichever world we choose to realise.

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[31] As James puts it in "Great Men and Their Environment" (1880):

> any given moment offer[s] ambiguous potentialities of development. Whether a young man enters business or the ministry may depend on a decision which has to be made before a certain day. He takes the place offered in the counting house, and is *committed*. Little by little, the habits, the knowledges, of the other career, which once lay so near, ceased to be reckoned even among his possibilities. At first, he may sometimes doubt whether the self he murdered in that decisive hour might not have been the better of the two; but with the years such questions themselves expire, and the old alternative *ego*, once so vivid, fades into something less substantial than a dream (1880, WB: 171).

In unique situations, we decide our future characters. The next section will examine what it means to choose, through unique situations, the total character of the world.

The uniqueness of each moral dilemma is in part a result of the decisions made in *previous* moral dilemmas. The world in which we face any moral dilemma will be a result of previous decisions regarding which ideals to realise and which to frustrate. It will also, perhaps, contain novel ideals, or new challenges to old ideals. As such there is no precise casuistic scale, conceptual apparatus, or "adequate […] rule" which will definitively indicate what conduct to adopt. It is certainly the case that general moral truths and rules which have been established throughout our inquiry can help to guide us through a particular moral problem. But seeing as concepts are general and static, the nuances of particular situations can, according to James, often overflow previous rules of conduct.[32] As James puts it, "[a]bstract rules indeed can help; but they help the less in proportion as our intuitions are more piercing, and our vocation is the stronger for the moral life" (1891, WB: 158). We must combine conceptual resources with the virtues of sympathy, sensitivity, and imagination (VI.3.9). Failure to do so can lead us to be blind to salient features of a particular situation (VI.3.4).

Often, once we have applied the moral and epistemic virtues to a situation, and appealed to the experiences of other people (seeing as different people will have access to different epistemic resources regarding a particular moral dilemma), then the decision might be obvious. At other times, however, either because reflection is inconclusive or because we have limited time or information, we are forced to make, at our own risk, a decision about which ideals and demands to realise on passional grounds. These are will-to-believe cases, as the decisions will be live (between two or more real possibilities), forced (the realisation of one ideal requires the rejection of others), and momentous (it makes a real difference to the world and the people within it), and not decidable on existing intellectual or epistemic evidence. In such situations, we must act on faith.

Does James mean that in such unique situations we can merely dogmatically assert whichever values we are ourselves partial to? Or does he mean that we must act as a philosopher, and refrain from making such a decision in the name of impartiality? No.

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[32] Of course, as Brennan (1961) points out, some of the uniqueness of a given situation is based on the uniqueness of a particular person's character. The particular temperaments and biographies of a person mean that it is "impossible for him successfully to apply to his moral difficulties exactly the same solutions which have worked for other men" (Brennan, 1961: 139). As James puts it:

> No two of us have identical difficulties, nor should we be expected to work out identical solutions. Each, from his peculiar angle of observation, takes in a certain sphere of fact and trouble, which each must deal with in a unique manner (1902, VRE: 384).

This does not prevent general moral norms and concepts from being useful and necessary. It is just that they never (or rarely) prescribe a single action when applied to a particular situation by a particular character.

As previously argued, part of what James is doing is rejecting the distinction between partisan and impartial inquirer (VI.3.1). We make a decision as a rational, sensitive, tolerant, and engaged member of a moral community. According to James, this translates into us acting with "fear and trembling" to bring about the "very largest total universe of good" (1891, WB: 158). As academic philosophers, we do not have any additional capacity to discern what the right course of act should be, though we might be better placed to see what is at stake in any given moment:

> The philosopher, then, *quâ* philosopher, is no better able to determine the best universe in the concrete emergency than other men. He sees, indeed, somewhat better than most men what the question always is—not a question of this good or that good simply taken, but of the two total universes with which these goods respectively belong. He knows that he must vote always for the richer universe, for the good which seems most organizable, most fit to enter into complex combinations, most apt to be a member of a more inclusive whole. But which particular universe this is he cannot know for certain in advance; he only knows that if he makes a bad mistake the cries of the wounded will soon inform him of the fact. In all this the philosopher is just like the rest of us non-philosophers, so far as we are just and sympathetic instinctively, and so far as we are open to the voice of complaint (1891, WB: 158-9).

The right decision is the one which brings about the richer universe. By "richer" here, James means the universe in which more ideals and demands can be realised, and the world in which the realised ideals are better able to come into relations and interactions in order to be part an inclusive whole.

We can already see the beginnings of how to untangle James's tension between our creation of the moral world, and our discovery of objective moral truths. We see at work here both *posterior productive* and *posterior non-productive* will-to-believe cases. In some cases, we act on ideals and our doing so allows us to discover that they already obtain in the world. In other cases, we act on ideals and our doing so brings about the world in which they are realised. But even in these *productive* cases in which we create the world in which our ideals are realised we do not create the rightness, wrongness, significance, or insignificance of those ideals. These are features which are revealed once the ideal has been actualised. We are *discovering* whether or not these ideals are really valuable *by creating* a world in which they are realised.

§2.2 THE TOTAL CHARACTER OF THE WORLD

As we have already seen, James is concerned throughout his career to deny accounts of the universe in which individual actions have no role to play in the formation of reality (§1.1; V.2.3; VI.2.4). This issue is addressed most obviously in two articles: "Great Men and Their Environment" (1880), and his follow up, "The Importance of Individuals" (1890), in which James responded to many of the criticisms which "Great Men" had received.

In these articles, James is concerned to argue against several different kinds of theory which see the formation of the universe to be governed solely by general features of properties of the whole. We will be unsurprised to learn that these include the deterministic materialism or evolutionism he associates with Spencer, and the historical idealism he associates with the followers of Hegel. These theories attempt to argue that the course of human history, and the course of cultural development, is either determined in advance by internal logic (idealism), or else determined solely by external pressures from the environment (materialism). Not only do both theories deny that the actions of individuals can have some real effect, and so threaten to alienate our practical natures, but James also thinks that such theories are practically useless. He calls such theories "retrospective hypotheses", by which he means that they can predict nothing of future events, but will accept any course of events after the fact as confirming their theory.[33]

Contrary to these theories, in "Great Men" James presents an account in which it is "the accumulated influences of individuals, […] their examples, their initiatives, and their decisions" which direct societal and cultural changes. It is individuals who produce novel and potentially fertile hypotheses, make new demands, challenge old values on the basis of new experience, and otherwise alter the social and moral structure of the

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[33] The theory of "the absolute", James tells us in *A Pluralistic Universe*, is "*useless for deductive purposes*" in precisely this sense:

> Whatever the details of experience may prove to be, after the fact of them the absolute will adopt them. It is an hypothesis that functions retrospectively only, not prospectively (1909, PU: 61).

Similarly, the theorist who holds that everything is determined by evolutionary pressure will always "appear after the fact" and "show that the quality developed by each race was, naturally enough, not incompatible with its habitat", but will "utterly fail to show that the particular form of compatibility fallen into in each case was the one necessary and only possible form" (1880, WB: 179). For the pragmatist, who holds that the meaning of any concept is determined by the practical effects it predicts of future experience, retrospective hypotheses are meaningless (I.3).

world. James calls the people who produce such effective novel hypotheses "great men" or "geniuses", but we do not need to think of such people as either male, as particularly clever, or as in a position of leadership. The same essential structure occurs on the large and the small scale, and by "geniuses" James seems to just mean people who "bring about a rearrangement, on a large or a small scale, of the pre-existing social relations" (1880, WB: 171). Seeing as, according to James, deciding any moral dilemma creates a new and unique world, it is clear that any one of us could be "geniuses" in the context of our reactions to these "lonely emergencies" (§2.1).[34]

People who effect *great* change have sensitivities which are "adapted to the receptivities of the moment", in the sense of them being aware of the real possibilities of a given historical context (VI.2.4-5). They will also have the energy and the will to bring about that change (VI.3.8). In this essay at least, James is not interested in whether or not such changes are good. Such people are just as likely to become "centres of corruption", or become "destroyers of other persons" as they are to produce amelioration (1880, WB: 170). There is no assurance that any change individuals bring about will be better than what it is changed from. But if there *is* to be progress, then it must take place through these mechanisms (§2.4).

James clarifies his position in "The Importance of Individuals" (1890). There James argues for the same position: that the make-up of the universe is made in part by the actions of individuals, rather than solely determined by the whole, and he offers a compelling metaphor to describe his position.

The metaphor James offers is of a growing tree. The mass of the tree is solid and stable, but is also "a dead and stagnant thing, an achieved possession, from which all insecurity has vanished". The trunk represents the cultural background of a community, the inherited set of dispositions, habits, interpretations, and common-sense ideas which they accept. On the outskirts of this mass of secure knowledge, or on the outer layer or the trunk, is a "formative zone", the "soft layer beneath the bark of the tree in which all the year's growth is going on". This part of the tree represents the ideals, beliefs, habits and practices which are "not yet engrained into the race's average". Though the trunk of the tree is now stable, it was "built up by successive concretions of successive active zones"

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[34] In a way, the focus James seems to give to "great men" is a distinctly un-Jamesian position. As James puts it in a letter to Sarah Wyman Whitman in 1899:

> I am against bigness & greatness in all their forms; and with the invisible molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, stealing in through the crannies of this world like so many soft rootlets or like the capillary oozing of water (1899, CWJ8: 546).

I suggest that the importance of his "Great Men" is the role he gives to all individuals, not the role he gives to "great" individuals within a certain historical or socio-economic context.

(1890, WB: 193-4). In the same way, though our cultural inheritance now seems stable, it is the result of previous areas of instability and decision.[35] As each generation passes, new additions to the mass of cultural knowledge and practices are added, in the same ways as successive outward areas of the tree trunk become integrated into the stable whole. As James puts it:

> The moving present in which we live with its problems and passions, its individual rivalries, victories, and defeats, will soon pass over to the majority and leave its small deposit on this static mass, to make room for fresh actors and a newer play (1890, WB: 193).

Cultural change occurs with each individual's and each generation's small deposit to the cultural mass.

The issue on which James and his critics disagree concerns what the subject matter of philosophy should be. Should it concern itself solely with the established rules, beliefs, ideals, and concepts of the culture, or should it also be concerned with the vital human matters which take place at the outer edge, where the future shape of our culture is being formed? The abstracted or intellectualistic vision James seeks to reject sees all of the activity at the edge of the "trunk" as being determined by the trunk's whole. This looks plausible to the intellectualistic thinker, because they focus on the whole, and the general principles which govern it, and as a result see as unimportant the work being done at the edge of the tree. For James, however, focusing on the new activity allows us to see individual natures at work in particular decisions. This "zone of insecurity in human affairs" is "the zone of formative process, the dynamic belt of quivering uncertainty, the line where past and future meet" and where the "dramatic interest lies". This area, where our inherited traditions encounter novel variations, situations, ideals, and experiences, is the formative and most important area of our ethical and cultural landscape. It represents the site of change, and the site which determines what our "small deposit on this static mass" will be (1890, WB: 193).

The "formative zone" James is talking about here will be made up of the kind of unique situations or "lonely emergencies" which we examined in the previous section. In many ways, this is an application of James's theory of self-formation to a societal or cultural level. We have seen that, on the basis of various decisions we make, and the areas of experience we turn our attention to, we form the habits which make up our selves (V.3.3). James is now telling us that communities are "just like individuals" in this sense, that they offer "ambiguous potentialities for development" at any given point, which we must decide upon, and which will shape the character of that community. War presents the most obvious case in which there is a "true point of bifurcation of future

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[35] This picture is very similar to the account of common-sense belief which James offers in *Pragmatism* (1907, P: 83-94; I.5).

possibilities", but so too do the enactment of civic policies, religious proclamations, and artistic, industrial, scientific, and moral discoveries (1880, WB: 171). On the basis of certain individuals' decisions in these moments of bifurcation, the habits, institutions, concepts, and available possibilities which are available for future generations are decided.

We can see these types of cases as will-to-believe cases, just on a broader level. Considering a community's current situation and inheritance, certain possibilities will be *live*, in the sense of plausible and possible directions for that culture to take. These decisions can be *momentous*, in the sense that through embarking on one possibility rather than another we are defining the identity of our society, culture, race or community. And they are often *forced*, not just in the obvious sense that going to war or not going to war are mutually exclusive decisions, but also in the more nuanced sense that even postponing a decision is a decision in favour of one of the options (usually the continuance of the status quo). Individuals make this decision in the only way they can: by choosing what to attend to, and so what reality they will consent to and act in light of (V.3.1). When enough people consent in this way, that reality becomes the cultural reality. Over time, this becomes entrenched in our cultural habits. As we have seen concerning individual habits, when something becomes entrenched in this way, it is hard to think and act outside of it (V.3.2-3; VI.3.4). This is the same communally. We instantiate these habits in institutions, in our language, in the concepts which we use, and in the common-sense that we pass on to the next generation. As each decision is made, many of their "operations widen with the course of time" (1880, WB: 171). That is to say, we come to rely on them more, they become connected to a wider array of our thought, actions, and institutions, and they become harder to think outside of. This is not to say they completely determine our behaviour. But they often determine what possibilities we subsequently have to choose from, individually and collectively.

As James's career progresses, he attributes this growth not just to individuals and communities, but to the universe as a whole. Accordingly, when we make moral decisions like those discussed in this and the previous section, we are determining not just *our* character, or the character of our community, but the "total character of the world" or "universe" which is as yet "unfinished" (1910, SPP: 115). James's metaphysically pluralistic account allows us to be "integral parts" and "co-determinants, by our behaviour, of what [the universe's] total character may be" (1906-7; ML: 416). To understand this position, we should question first how the universe as James understands it exhibits growth, and secondly how we are co-determinants of the direction of this growth.

The universe as it is considered under radical empiricism is fundamentally experiential (IV.1.1). The universe as experience grows over time much like our personal experience does. Our personal experience grows and changes as we move from one object of

attention to another, through the transitive relations which link them. New possibilities of thought and action are available to us as our experience changes, but our past store of experience forms the bulk of our character. In our experience, we encounter novel objects and ideas, and these novel ideas are subsequently added to our previous experience.[36] The universe considered as experience grows in much the same way. As James puts it in "A World of Pure Experience" (1904),

> experience itself, taken at large, can grow by its edges [...] one moment of it proliferates into the next by transitions which, whether conjunctive or disjunctive, continue the experiential tissue (1904, ERE: 42).

The relations which hold between objects develop and change over time, in the same way as they do in our personal experience, and novel items are continually added to the universe:

> [n]ew men and women, books, accidents, events, inventions, enterprises, burst unceasingly upon the world. It is vain to resolve these into ancient elements, or to say that they belong to ancient kinds, so long as no one of them in its full individuality ever was here before or will ever come again (1910, SPP: 78).

The universe as experience is made up of all the different objects or focal points of experience held together through the relations which obtain between them. As new objects emerge, and new relations form, the universe develops and grows.

When James says that we are co-determinants of this growth, he simply means that our actions are in part responsible for the relations which form, and which novel items are introduced or accepted. We create new ideas and items, and through our decisions we determine which shall be realised, and so enter into actual relations with the rest of experienceable reality, and which are ignored or dropped. It is in this sense that our ideals and faiths "may be regarded as a formative factor in the universe" in the sense that we are "co-determinants, by our behaviour, of what its total character may be" (1906-7, ML: 416). Our decisions during the "lonely emergencies" of life do not merely help to determine our own characters, and do not even merely help to determine the character of our community, but help to determine the character of the universe.

It is philosophy's task, according to James, to offer us an interpretation of the total character of the world (1907, P: 24-4; 1906-7, ML: 414; 1910, SPP: 112). Absolute idealism and deterministic materialism offer as an account of that character which is already fixed. James's pluralistic and experiential account of the total character of the world is *melioristic*. That is to say the world is unfinished, and our reactions to it are one of the

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[36] As James puts it in a pencil note "we live ever on the edge of growing novelty" (1910, SPP: 404; note to 1910, SPP: 78)

fundamental ways its final character will be ultimately decided (1910, SPP: 115; 1906-7, ML: 418). It is to this meliorism which we now turn.

In this section I would like to look at two important instances in which James thinks that our attitudes and behaviours can alter the general character of the world. The first concerns whether the world is a positive or negative place. The second concerns whether the world is conducive to moral interpretation, such that moral inquiry is possible. I will take each in turn.

In the 1882 version of his paper "The Sentiment of Rationality", James describes what he sees as problematic general feature of evolutionary thinking. The evolutionist, according to James, interprets the world, and aims to make universal propositions about it, whilst subtracting from the world the possible actions that human inquirers and actors can take. James expresses the general form of his criticism in the following:

> In every proposition whose bearing is universal (and such are all the propositions of philosophy), the acts of the subject and their consequences throughout eternity should be included in the formula. If M represent the entire world *minus* the reaction of the thinker upon it, and $M + x$ represent the absolutely total matter of philosophic propositions (x standing for the thinker's reaction and its results)—what would be a universal truth if the term x were of one complexion, might become egregious error if x altered its character. Let it not be said that x is too infinitesimal a component to change the character of the immense whole in which it lies imbedded. Everything depends on the point of view of the philosophic proposition in question (1882, WB: 81).

If the individual (x) *is* completely determined by the mass (M), then the evolutionist has made no mistake by ignoring x when giving universal propositions about M. If, however, the x counts as an original contribution to M, then the evolutionist, and anyone else who wants to present universal propositions without including the role of the individual, has made a mistake.

As this is mostly identical to James's position in "The Importance of Individuals" (1890), which we looked at in the previous section, it is not worth examining too closely here. What is interesting about this paper is the example that James offers to demonstrate the individual's contribution to M. James's example is of a world in which all the facts about it (M) are wholly negative. Making universal propositions about this world with only M

in view, we might be correct in calling the world negative. However, the individual (x) facing this world still has a choice: whether or not to adopt a positive or negative attitude in the face of it. If x adopts a pessimistic attitude, then x confirms and completes the negative facts of M. Now the whole world is "an utterly black picture", the pessimistic world view is made "true beyond a doubt", and any universal propositions regarding the negativity of M are valid of the true whole, $M + x$. If, however, the individual faces the negative of M and uses it to fuel a kind of stern or joyful attitude, gaining pleasure in overcoming the various negative features of M, then the make-up of the whole world has now changed. $M + x$ is now not identical to M, because $M + x$ contains a good which M alone does not. In this case, the individual's reaction to the whole, seeing as the individual is part of the whole, changes the character of the whole (1882, WB: 83).[37]

This example is a fairly subjective one. But nonetheless, James is sure that the contribution and the changed status of the world when x decides to be optimistic (or melioristic) is objective. Something new has been added to the world, on the basis of an individual's decisions, such that universal propositions about that world's negativity are no longer true. The simple point James is making here is that our personal contributions can alter the objective nature of the world precisely because our personal contributions *are* an objective part of the world. The thinker who separates M and x in order to make supposedly universal statements about M assumes a dualism in which human minds and actions are distinct from the world they inhabit.[38]

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[37] It is worth noting that for this example to work the originally negative M must contain the *possibility* of being improved. The wholly negative nature of M must be restricted to the actualities of the situation, not to possibilities. Otherwise, x would lose the motivation and power to act to better M.

[38] James returns to this line of thought in his 1907 letter to Dickinson S. Miller:

> I am a natural realist. The world *per se* may be likened to a cast of beans on a table. By themselves they spell nothing. An onlooker may group them as he likes. He may simply count them all and map them. He may select groups and name these capriciously, or name them to suit certain extrinsic purposes of his. Whatever he does, so long as he *takes account* of them, his account is neither false nor irrelevant. If neither, why not call it true? It *fits* the beans – *minus* – him, and *expresses* the *total* fact, of beans-*plus*-him (Letter to D. S. Miller, April 1907, CWJ 11: 411).

James here again commits himself to the idea that $M+x$ is the total fact of any world, but emphasises his "realism" by stating that any treatment of the world ($M + x$) must "fit" the facts of M, which are independent of the individual (x). Hillary Putnam calls this the "clearest statement of James's realism" in the sense that

> though different right descriptions are possible, corresponding to different purposes, still the "world *per se*" is not infinitely plastic; there is a relation of

James goes on to talk in this paper of our second example: the moral nature of the world. The question of whether or not the world is a moral place is, for a pluralist and empiricist like James, a matter of whether or not the universe of our experience confirms our hypothesis that it is such a place. We adopt the hypothesis that the world is a moral place (*x*) and subject the mass of existing facts (*M*) to this hypothesis. If *M* + *x* are in accord, in the long run, then our hypothesis will be shown to be correct. James puts this by saying that our hypothesis will be "reversed by nothing that later turns up" in experience, and that the "entire drift of experience" will continue to confirm it. Interpreting the universe as moral has, in this case, resulted in confirmation of that hypothesis. If, on the other hand, I adopt this hypothesis and it is not true, this will be shown by the "course of experience [...] throw[ing] ever new impediments in the way of my belief". Of course, James tells us that "in a question of this scope, the experience of the entire human race must make the verification" (1882, WB: 86-87).

The attempt to prove that the universe is a moral place requires the adoption that it is, as a working hypothesis or faith. My examination of *M* alone cannot give me an answer. It is my action under this hypothesis (*x*) which "reveals the latent nature of the mass to which it applied". It is in this way that James likens the universe to a lock:

> [i]f we try the moral key *and it fits*, it is a moral lock. If we try the unmoral key and *it* fits, it is an unmoral lock. I cannot possibly conceive of any other sort of "evidence" or "proof" than this (1882, WB: 88).

This is James defending a will-to-believe case on familiar epistemic grounds (§1.4). Our adoption of the hypothesis that the world is a moral one is required for discerning whether or not it is such a place. The question is whether such a case is a *posterior productive* or *non-productive* case. And the answer is that it contains some elements of both.

Either the universe (*M*) is conductive to moral interpretation (it is a "moral lock"), or it is not. And, whichever is true, we (*x*) either adopt the moral hypothesis (try the "moral key") or we do not. If the universe *is* conducive to moral interpretation, *and* we adopt the moral hypothesis, then our acting under this hypothesis creates the circumstances for the truth to be revealed. If the universe is conducive to moral interpretation, and we do *not* adopt and act under the moral hypothesis, then we fail to realise the possibility of the world to be so interpreted. In the first case, this looks like a posterior non-productive case: our adoption of an hypothesis merely reveals the "latent nature of the mass". In the second case, though the nature of the mass remains the same, our choice

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"fitting the beans," as well as a relation of "expressing the total fact" (Putnam, 2002: xxxv-vi).

We'll see that this combination of subjective interest with independent fact is what makes up the solution to the problem we are addressing in this chapter.

to refuse the moral hypothesis prevents this nature from revealing itself. We have therefore *created* a world which is immoral, though it had the possibility to be moral. This looks more like a posterior productive case. Nonetheless, were the world to be *un*conducive to moral interpretation, our moral hypothesis would not, in the long run, have been able to find evidence for its validity. What this case shows us, then, is that our faiths cannot alter what is generally possible, but only what possibilities will become actually realised.

James's opponents, then, assume that the universe (*M*) is already complete, and that our role (*x*) is merely to catalogue its nature. It is this thought which allows the evidentialist to condemn our acting before all of the evidence of *M* is in. However, if our actions *x* have a role in shaping an as yet unfinished *M*, then withholding our consent to some possible reality can be the same as refusing to realise it. As James puts it in his "Faith and the Right to Believe", "[i]naction […] often counts as action. In many issues the inertia of one member will impede the success of the whole as much as his opposition will" (1910, SPP: 115).[39]

In many senses, the disagreement between James and his opponents regarding the role of the individual is another instance of the "pregnant" distinction between monistic and pluralistic philosophy. If monistic, we believe the universe is already finished and complete, and in such a universe the individual has no role to play. If pluralistic, we believe the world is still in the making, contains real possibilities, and that the individual is a contributor to what the actual shape of the universe will ultimately be. James indicates this difference by suggesting that the total character of the pluralistic world can only be expressed by *hypothetical* propositions, whereas the monistic world insists on a world of *categorical* propositions (1910, SPP: 115).

In a pluralistic universe, the actions and efforts of individuals are required to "bring it to a prosperous issue". This is James's meliorism. For the most part, though, it is not just *our* individual efforts which can better the world, but the efforts of all of humanity. In this sense, no matter how much effort one individual puts into realising some ideal, they are dependent on others to also consent. As James puts it:

> As individual members of a pluralistic universe, we must recognize that even though we do *our* best, the other factors also will have a voice in the result. If they refuse to conspire, our good-will and labor may be thrown away (1910, SPP: 115-116; 1906-7, ML: 418).

In adopting our faiths and ideals, we are at risk not only of error, but also of other people not attending, consenting, and realising the ideals we find significant. Nonetheless, just

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[39] Faith and the Right to Believe" was published as an appendix to his unfinished *Some Problems in Philosophy* (1910), but written in 1906-7 under his "Syllabus in Philosophy D: General Problems of Philosophy" (ML: 378ff.).

as we must believe the realisation of our ideal to be possible in order to be motivated to follow it, so too must we adopt the belief in the rationality, sensitivity, and good-will of others. This is a requisite for living and doing good in a pluralistic world.

This faith in the goodness of other human beings is a will-to-believe choice. It is forced (there are two mutually independent options, and refusing to decide is the same as refusing to believe), momentous (it concerns how we live our lives in relation to others, and whether we think our ideals can prosper), live (it is real possibility to us that those around us can share or hinder our ideals), and undecidable on prior intellectual or empirical grounds. Faced with the knowledge that we must adopt a faith in others in order to act to improve the character of the world, we have four options. We could wait for evidence of other's trustworthiness before the fact. We could mistrust them. We could trust them. Or we could adopt different stances on different days. The last is "no systematic solution". The second makes certain that the outcome will be negative, as we prevent our ideals being actualised by mistrusting other people. The first "may be in practice indistinguishable" from mistrust, and might lead to the same outcome. As such, James recommends adopting trust in the other powers of the universe as a requirement for acting to ameliorate the world (1910, SPP: 116; 1906-7, ML: 418).

In a pluralistic and melioristic world, the hypothetical proposition which we ought to adopt on faith is the following: "*[i]f* we do *our* best, *and* the other powers do *their* best, the world will be perfected" (1910, SPP: 116). This proposition does not refer to an actual fact that exists in the world. Rather it refers to a real possibility which our belief and effort is required to actualise. The proposition serves to "*challenge our will to produce the premise of fact required*". That is to say, it serves to challenge us act so as to produce a world in which the hypothesis we adopted on faith could find its verification. In this sense, we "*create* the conclusion" through our will, in the sense that "[o]nly through our precursive trust in it can it come into being" (1910, SPP: 116; 1906-7, ML: 418-9).[40] This is a clear example of a productive will-to-believe case. But it still requires that the world's betterment is a real possibility of the universe, prior to our action, and independent of our faiths and ideals.

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[40] I assume by "percursive" here James means something like "repeated and co-ordinated between people".

§2.4 MORAL PROGRESS

I have been talking so far as if it were clear what we might mean by "making the world a better place". But this is far from obvious. What, precisely, does James mean when he talks about ameliorating the world? Unfortunately, he is not overly clear on this topic. However, based on what we have already said, we can determine five different and mutually supportive criteria which might denote moral progress on a Jamesian model.

Before outlining these criteria, it is worth mentioning two concrete things James actually does say about the nature of progress. First, James is insistent that "betterness" is a relation which requires a subjective component. Just like "good" or "bad", "betterness" cannot obtain without some subject who could or would judge or feel that thing to be better than some other thing (1891, WB: 145). This is merely to stick to the radical empirical principle that we cannot look outside the actual or potential experience of moral agents to provide a notion of objective progress. Secondly, we have seen that James has offered us a subjective notion of progress, by which he means the union of reality with ideality (1898, TT: 164; V.2.2). This is just to say that our feeling of progress is responsive to how much our ideals are actually realised.

On to the five possible criteria for Jamesian moral progress. The first is that objective moral progress consists in a broader array of ideals being realised, and being related to each other to form a substantive moral *uni*verse, rather that distinct moral *multi*verses. This is what James expresses when he tells us that we must, as philosophers and good ethical inquires, aim to bring about the richest possible universe of good (1891, WB: 158-9; §2.1). In order for this to represent objective progress, we must assume that the ideals which are realised are those which are more objectively significant in the ways already discussed (VI.2).[41] Quality and diversity of ideals, rather than mere quantity, is what counts as progress here. A world in which more of these kinds of ideals and demands are realised would be a morally superior world, seeing as more people will be better able to find satisfaction and significance in their lived worlds. And it will also be epistemically preferable, seeing as more hypotheses about what counts as good, and how different goods can be combined, can be explored in such a world.[42]

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[41] James appears to mean something like this by his comment, during his Robert Shaw oration, that the abolitionists "were the voice of the world's conscience" and "a part of destiny" (1897, ERM: 66). The success of abolitionism marks progress in an objective sense, not just in the subjective sense.

[42] Myers criticises James for not being able to ground his pluralistic belief that a world in which more *goods* are satisfied is a better world. According to him, James simply assumes this on the basis of personal intuition:

A second way that we might think about moral progress concerns how related, or relatable, our ideals and demands are. James appears to hold that a more *inclusive* world is a superior one, and so suggests that we prefer more inclusive ideals, which "prevail at the least cost", from exclusionary ideals. When formulating our own ideals, we should try to find a way to realise them which can also potentially "satisfy alien demands" (1891, WB: 155). Seeing as we are aiming to create a stable moral universe, not merely a set of discrete realised ideals and satisfied demands, ideals which are, or can be, expressed in ways that support and related to other ideals will be preferable to those that do not. A more inclusive moral universe denotes more moral progress.[43]

A third criterion for progress might be the number of novel moral hypotheses that a society enables, allows, or encourages. The significance of a human life is felt most keenly when we feel ourselves to be, though our own effort, actualising a novel ideal in the world. It might be considered a mark of progress if a world allows for more novel hypotheses to be explored. This is preferable epistemically (as it allows more hypotheses to be explored in our ongoing moral inquiry) and also morally (as there are more possible goods, and more people leading significant human lives).

A fourth criterion of progress might be how well a culture allows for the education and exercise of the moral virtues I outlined in the previous chapter (VI.3.9). If our educational

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> But what secured James's confidence in this goal? Nothing purely factual, including the mores that civilisation has gradually adopted, is capable of justifying such a goal, for James appears to have assumed that *ought* is not derivable from *is* […] James's confidence in the great experiment's goal as he described it must be based solely on his own intuition that that goal is what ought to be (Myers, 1986: 399).

Talisse and Aikin (2016) share a similar concern (2016: 22; see III.1.2). This is one sense in which my epistemic reading of James's injunction to satisfy as many demands as possible is superior to the utilitarian reading, in which the maximisation of satisfied demands is seen as the moral goal in and of itself. James holds that *if* we are to discover which are the *true* goods, and how they might interact, *then* we must allow as many demands as possible to be realised. If it is revealed through this process that many different demands have worthy claims to be true goods, then we have no reason not to satisfy as many of them as possible.

[43] James appears to say something combining these first and second notions of moral progress in "The Moral Philosopher":

> Polyandry and polygamy and slavery, private warfare and liberty to kill, judicial torture and arbitrary royal power have slowly succumbed to actually aroused complaints; and though someone's ideals are unquestionably the worse off for each improvement, yet a greater total number of them find shelter in our civilized societies than in the older savage ways (1891, WB: 155).

Though contemporary moralists might deny James's rejection of polyandry, James's idea is that a *decrease* of demands which prevailed at a high cost, and an *increase* in number and inclusivity of other demands, represents progress.

institutions foster the production of more sensitive, attentive, rational, tolerant, and courageous moral inquirers, then under this criterion that would be a mark of progress. This would mark a community with more people who were responsive to each other's needs, demands, and moral experiences, and so one both morally and epistemically advanced.[44]

Finally, we might consider measuring moral progress by looking at our current place in our ongoing moral inquiry. As moral inquiry progresses, we gain access to general moral truths, concepts, principles, and habits which have been tested in experience, which have proved themselves to be useful, and which form a communal store of ethical common-sense (I.5; II.2). An increase in the number of these moral resources might be indicative of moral progress. Of course, this must come with the caveat that no previous concepts, principles, or habits will ever be precisely applicable to unique moral situations (§2.1).[45]

These five criteria are mutually supportive, and it is certainly possible that a given community might demonstrate progress in each of these senses. But they are also separable, and a society might experience progress in one of these senses but not in another. Though these criteria do not refer to anything outside of the experience of moral agents, and do not assume one pre-established goal or end of inquiry, nonetheless they represent possible objective criteria for the assessment of moral progress.

Towards the end of his life, James was concerned with the value of war and of a militaristic life. It is in his approach to these topics that we can see most clearly his appeal to some of the criteria laid out in this section.

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[44] Stuart Rosenbaum recently expressed a similar idea in his work on defending a pragmatist account of the virtue of "integrity". Rejecting a monistic, Aristotelian version of virtue, Rosenbaum suggests that:

> [m]oral philosophy is the battery of projects involved in understanding *who we are* so that we might more fully realize ideals that move us personally and communally towards better futures (Rosenbaum, 2015: 11).

James seems to appeal to such an idea when he tells us that the "saintliness" is a morally superior way of life, partially because it is suited to the "highest society conceivable", in which there is "no aggressiveness, but only sympathy and fairness" (1902, VRE: 298).

[45] Phillip Kitcher offers a similar account of pragmatist moral progress in his recent work (2011). According to Kitcher, all human beings are embarked on a collective ethical project, and we should think of our progress in this project technologically rather than teleologically (2011: 218). We make progress not as get closer to some goal, but as we gain the conceptual resources which allow us to better succeed in some practice. However, this account requires that we have an agreement regarding exactly what this practice is, an agreement which Kitcher places in pre-history (2011: 8-9). This agreement can, of course, never be proven or experienced by current members of the ethical project. As such, Kitcher presents a monistic theory which appeals to trans-experiential features, which would as a result be rejected by James.

Speaking at the World Peace Congress in 1904, James reflects that the "permanent enemy" of a peaceful world is no particular country, but the "bellicosity of human nature". The desire for fighting and for war runs deep within our natures, and the only way to combat this desire is practically. James suggests that we find practical and institutional ways to check this desire, and which redirect our "heroic energies" in less destructive directions. Notice that James is not suggesting that we simply eradicate this part of our natures, or even that it would be better if we *could* do so. Though James finds war repellent, the energetic and strenuous life military life requires, and the struggle to realise ideals which war represents, are obvious ways that human life can be found to be significant (§1.1; §1.2). As such, James is not unsympathetic to the perspective – common at the time – that found the concept of a world without war to be one which had been robbed of its "zest" and "interest" (1906, ERM: 120-3).[46]

James returns to this problem of war in one of his final papers, "The Moral Equivalent of War" (1910), where he offers a potential solution. Once again, James emphases our deep-rooted pugnacity and love of war. War represents "human nature at its highest dynamic" and thus is "an absolute good" according to a certain perspective. A world without war would be a "sheep's paradise", according to this view (1910, ERM: 163-166). James admits in himself, and speculates in everyone, a certain sympathy with this perspective. No "healthy-minded person", he tells us, "can help partaking of it to some degree". This is because this militarism is a "preserver of our ideals of hardihood, and human life without hardihood would be contemptible". We have to accept that the martial virtues are "permanent human goods", rather than merely denouncing those who have them. However, by entering into a sympathetic understanding of this perspective and viewpoint, James thinks he can find an alternative to war which still meets the features that the militaristic mind finds so attractive, without the death and destruction of warfare (1910, ERM: 166-170).

On reflection, James tells us, the militaristic view-point contains an aesthetic ideal and a moral ideal. The aesthetic ideal is the various charms of military life, and the value of deciding the destiny of people "quickly, thrillingly, and tragically by force". The moral ideal is seeing war as "the supreme theatre of human strenuousness". Like a good radical empiricist, James refuses to reject either insight as straightforwardly incorrect or unworthy of being engaged with. Our aim should be to find something which satisfied

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[46] In a prescient quote for his last year of life, James expresses his concern for modern warfare:

> when whole nations are the armies, and the science of destruction vies in intellectual refinement with the sciences of production, I see that war becomes absurd and impossible from its own monstrosity (1910, ERM: 170).

James recognised that the stakes of war were getting higher, and that it was more vital than ever to discover some peaceful alternative for this side of our natures.

these ideals, but which isn't as morally problematic as war. Interestingly, James proposes a socialistic solution. Rather than having a class of people who are permanently constrained to do menial and difficult tasks, and to live in hardship, James proposes a national conscription of the youth to engage in such tasks. Not only would this satisfy the militaristic virtues, but it would have additional moral benefits:

> If now – and this is my idea – there were, instead of military conscription, a conscription of the whole youthful population to form for a certain number of years a part of the army enlisted against nature […] The military ideals of hardihood and discipline would be wrought into the glowing fibre of the people [and] no-one would remain blind, as the luxurious classes now are blind, to man's real relations to the globe he lives on, and to the permanently solid and hard foundations of his higher life (1910, ERM: 171)

> […]

> Such a conscription, with the state of public opinion that would have required it, and the moral fruits it would bear, would preserve in the midst of a pacific civilization the manly virtues which the military party is so afraid of seeing disappear in peace. We should get toughness without callousness, authority with as little criminal cruelty as possible, and painful work done cheerily because the duty is temporary, and threatens not, as now, to degrade the whole remainder of one's life (1910, ERM: 172).

James's solution consists in redirecting our militaristic impulses and habits, so that these ideals are met rather than ignored, but met at less expense to other ideals. The public conscription James suggests enables the militaristic virtues to be realised, as well as encouraging in the conscripted youth an awareness of different ways of life, and so encouraging the removal of moral "blindness" (VI.3.4).[47] In presenting this solution, James is demonstrating several of the criteria which I suggested represented moral progress. A world where his suggestions were taken up would be one where militaristic ideals are actualised in a more inclusive way, *and* one in which the moral virtues of sensitivity and tolerance were fostered.[48]

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[47] The curbing or reallocation of our pugnacious instincts was something which concerned James a great deal during the last few years of his life. This is something which Myers attributes, with good reason, to James's growing horror at America's imperialism (Myers 1986: 437-444). Myers reports that James planned to write a book called *A Psychology of Jingoism* or *Varieties of Military Experience*, but that "The Moral Equivalent of War" was as close as James came (Myers, 1986: 600-1n142).

[48] Campbell (2015) offers us another example of moral progress in James through the example of the vivisection of animals. Whereas James always maintained that vivisection was cruel, early on he thought it scientifically necessary, held that the benefits for inquiry outweighed the cruelty done to the animals, and thought that the individual vivisectionists should be the judge of when

§2.5 Ethical Inquiry and World Building

The formation of the objective moral universe is very similar to the formation of objective reality which I presented in Chapter IV. There we saw that no object of our experience immediately and infallibly presented itself as "objective" or "subjective", but that through attention to our experience, the experience of others, and empirical investigation, we were able to determine which objects of experience should be categorised as objectively real. Over time and generations of experience, we thus produce a stable picture of objective reality (IV.4.3).

Starting with radical empiricism's assumption that everything which is experienceable is by that fact real, we have no *a priori* reason for rejecting the idea that our ideals, demands, and feelings of significance could not also be amenable to a similar treatment. Through a process of inquiry, and on a long enough timeline, it might be possible to discover objective truths about the moral universe, just as it is for the physical universe.

This chapter has noted a slight problem with this picture of moral inquiry. Scientific inquiry typically investigates a world of pre-existing facts. In such cases, it is accurate to say that the evidence of the truth or falsity of a certain proposition already lies at the end of a series of possible conjunctive experiences. Whether we set out to discover that truth or not, it is *virtually* true before we gain the evidence of its validity (IV.1.5). However, as we have seen in this chapter, many of our hypotheses regarding our ideals are adopted on faith, and the very adoption of those hypotheses might be a precondition for bringing about the state of affairs which verify them. If the final outcome of moral inquiry in some sense depends on the hypotheses which we adopt and act under, then it seems much less likely that a non-arbitrary conclusion could emerge from this process.

However, James's position on real possibility in radical empiricism means that this feature of moral inquiry does not necessitate a non-objective conclusion. Under radical empiricism, the possible relations between elements of reality are just as real as actual relations between elements of reality. It can be a discoverable fact that x, y, and z are all live possibilities for belief and action, just as it can be a discoverable fact that a, b, and c are not such possibilities. Though the hypotheses we adopt and act under can alter the shape of the *actual* world we live in and realise (and so alter what is a live possibility for

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it was necessary (1875, ECR: 13). Later in his career however, James held that that such a view "flatly contradict[s] the best conscience of our time" (1909, ERC: 191-2) and he argued that the vivisectionists ought to be "made responsible to some tribunal" for their decisions (Letter to Sarah Norcliffe Cleghorn, 1903, CWJ 10: 303-304). Thus, James recognises that there has been an advance the culture's sensitivity towards vivisected animals, and suggests institutional support for that sensitivity.

future situations), the possibilities available to us at any time are objectively discoverable features of a situation.

Further, the mere fact that we decide to realise one possibility over another does not make the resulting reality superior to the other alternatives. We can decide which ideal, out of a set of incompossible ideals, to realise. But we cannot *make* that ideal satisfying in the long run, or capable of standing up to sustained challenge, or capable of entering into relations with other ideals. The adoption and realisation of any hypothesis only allows us to discover the evidence for its validity, and does not in any way constitute that validity.

We are also not in control of how ideals can enter into relations with one another. Which ideals can be realised with which other ideals, and which they exclude and prevent, are discoverable features of the relations which obtain between those ideals. We cannot through our will create a relation between the ideals of tyranny and the ideals of democracy. Nothing about our belief or faith will change the actual and possible relations which obtain between ideals.

The same is true regarding the general possibilities of the universe as a whole. Our faith that the universe is conducive to moral interpretation is required for moral inquiry, and our faith that if we and others do our part that we can better the world we live in is required for melioristic action. But no matter what our wants or needs are, these faiths cannot change whether or not moral inquiry and amelioration are *actual possibilities* in the universe. *If* they are, then it is only by adopting these hypotheses and acting under them that inquiry and amelioration can be achieved. But we may, after all, be living in a world which is unconducive to moral interpretation. In such a world, no faith, set of virtues, no amount of discussion or collaboration will lead to a stable system of moral goods, because that is simply not one of the possibilities live in the world. The success or failure of moral inquiry depends on our efforts. But the possibility of success does not.

It is certainly the case that our choices of hypotheses govern which ideals become realised in the actual world, and in what way, and so (in part) determine the live possibilities available for the next generation. And in this sense, moral inquiry does differ from the inquiries of the physical sciences. But though our volitional nature might shape which ideals become realised, they do not shape the facts regarding the verification and assessment of those ideals. It remains a possibility that we might realise the wrong ideals, and reject the right ones. There always is a better and worse way of proceeding.

Nonetheless, the role that individuals have in the formation of the actual moral landscape is sufficient to satisfy our practical natures (§1.1; §1.2), and generate a sense of responsibility which encourages us to adopt the strenuous mood (VI.3.8). The character

of the actual world is not yet determined, and our efforts and actions are co-determinants of it. As James puts it:

> 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 there were something really wild in the universe which we, with all our idealities and faithfulnesses, are needed to redeem [...] For such a half-wild, half-saved universe our nature is adapted (1895, WB: 55).

The exact character of the world, the ideals it allows for and those it rejects, the interpretations it encourages and those it refutes, the progress it makes towards improvement or regression, is to a large extent up to us.

CONCLUSION

The expressed aim of this thesis was to present an account of William James's ethics which was realist whilst still maintaining a role for individuals and their interactions within moral inquiry. I defined "realist" by reference to Peirce, as meaning "that whose characters are independent of what anybody may think them to be", and as independent not of thought, but of everything which is *arbitrary* in thought (1878, W3: 271-273). Being an ethical realist in this sense means being able to reach conclusions in our ethical inquiries which are independent of our arbitrary wants, opinions, and biases.

All pragmatists ground normative notions, such as "the good" and "truth", in the practices of creatures like us. Given this view, it is a fine line for the pragmatist to tread between having normative notions *emerge* from such practices, and having them be *reducible* to such practices. I agree with Misak, and other contemporary Peirceans, that the pragmatist should come down on the side of this divide which gives our normative notions some "real force" (Misak, 2013b: 436). It has been my aim to present James in precisely this light, at least in the ethical sphere.

The real complication with reading James in this way concerns the important role that he wants to give to individual agents in moral inquiry. However, I have indicated two reasons why James seeks to give this role to individuals. We can see the first in Chapter II, with the problems which emerge from Peirce's refusal to give *any* role to the individual perspective, inter-personal interactions, or cultural differences in moral inquiry. Though the position which Peirce defends is certainly realist in his own sense, his hard-line position on the inclusion of the individual perspective into moral inquiry

results in the practices and experiences of actual people being irrelevant to ethical inquiry. This view clashes with the view of democratic inquiry which contemporary pragmatists (rightly) want to defend, and which Peirce himself defends in other areas. The second reason James wishes to provide a role for individuals can be seen in the final chapter, where we see James argue that without such a contribution, life for beings such as us would be meaningless.

The real problem was marrying these two features of James's account: his commitment to a kind of Peircean realism on the one hand, and a commitment to the creativity and contribution of individuals on the other. I have attempted to do so by appealing to features of James's metaphysics, and applying them to his ethics.

James's metaphysics holds that the fundamental *stuff* of reality is experiential, and that reality is pluralistic, rather than monistic. By this James primarily meant that different independent portions of reality are related in various ways, and un-related in others, and that the universe of our experience is unified by these experiential relations. He still had room for general features of reality on such an account, but not for anything which was general over *every* feature of reality. I argued in Chapter IV that, despite his reliance on experience, James was attempting to present an objective realist account, just without appealing to anything transcendent of our experience. Rather than any experience presenting itself as "objective" in the first instance, instead its relation to other experiential objects, the properties it demonstrated within these relations, and the experience of other people is what allowed us to build a sense of "objective reality".

The version of James's ethics presented in Part II essentially appealed to the same structure. Every experience of value, what James calls a "demand" or "ideal", has an equal worthiness to be considered. None of them present themselves to be immediately objectively good, or objectively obligatory. Through examining our moral experience, the relations our ideals have to other ideals, the properties that the objects we value demonstrate in multiple circumstances, and other people's experiences of value, we slowly gain more stable knowledge about what is or is not objectively good. This is James's notion of moral inquiry, and his simple contention is that if any stable order of ideals and goods were to emerge from such an inquiry, then they would be just as real as the notions of objective reality which emerge from practical and scientific inquiries.

Unlike Peirce, however, James thinks that the relevant kinds of inquirers are "everyday" individuals, rather than theoretical philosophers. The world of value and significance is pluralistic and complex, and no one person can see it all. If there is a truth to be had about how to order our goods and obligations (and we must hope there is), then it is to be found through each of us living according to our own fallible conception of the good, defending it in conversation with other people, and revising it in the face of

countervailing experience. I have outlined in Chapter VI the kinds of process and virtues which could lead such an inquiry to emerge with an objective conception of the good.

James also allows individuals to have an important role in moral inquiry is the selection of which hypotheses will be pursued, and which abandoned. This was made clear in Chapter VII. It is not the case that whatever people select will become objectively good, because there are multiple other factors which determine objectivity. But it *is* the case that there are a number of equally plausible, and likely incompossible options available to be pursued. And we often have to make decisions on these matters before all the data is in. In this sense, individuals and their decisions are responsible for the direction that moral inquiry takes, for the values which are ultimately realised, for the habits we inculcate in ourselves and in the next generation, and (to a certain extent) for the moral character of the world in which we live.

Despite the important role that the individual plays in moral inquiry, the validity or invalidity of particular hypotheses will not be the arbitrary result of what individual agents or communities happen to affirm. It is not up to me, up to you, or up to any number of people whether or not a value is satisfying in the long run, coheres with other values that we hold, continues to be held in the face of criticism and experience, stubbornly resists rejection or abandonment, would be accepted by people of different perspectives, and so on. So, though the individuals shape the inquiry, they cannot shape the validity of the options that inquiry ultimately decides upon. In this way, James maintains his realism and also provides a role for individuals.

It is worth noting at the close of this thesis that the Jamesian position expressed here points to new and interesting links with other traditions and debates. When first conceived, it was the aim of this thesis to provide an environmentalist reading of James's ethics. Though providing an objective account of James's ethics turned out to be a sufficiently complex task, I suspect that this is still a promising avenue of inquiry. The environmental importance of James's ethics becomes evident when we consider his suggestion that "any creature, however weak" can make demands which are morally relevant (1891, WB: 149). He in no way restricts demands to sapient creatures, and his non-intellectualist definitions of demands as brute affirmations of some significant reality is consistent with even the lowest form of creature having demands of the relevant sort.[1] Though there has been some interest in pragmatist inspired environmental ethics in recent years, little work on James in this area exists.[2]

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[1] 1878, EPh: 18; 1883-4, MEN: 285.

[2] Most existing work on pragmatist environmental ethics comes from a Deweyan perspective (Weston, 2004; 2009; Welchman, 1999; Parker, 1996; Hickman, 1996), though there is some scattered work on Peirce (Anderson, 1995) and James (Stephens, 2009; Lekan, 2012; Fuller, 1992).

A second, and connected, avenue for future research is the connection between pragmatist ethics and contemporary second-personal ethics. I have shown that James holds that obligation is not a matter of personal preference, or of an adherence to an impersonal standard, but of "life answering to life" (1891, WB: 149). This is not a feature of James's account which many scholars focus on, but it does seem central to what James takes moral obligation to be. I have briefly compared James's view to two other second-personal ethicists, in particular Darwall (2006; 2013) and Løgstrup (1956/1997) (V.7.1). But this is an interesting and underexplored connection between two traditions, which deserves a much more developed assessment.

Finally, the position I have presented in this thesis indicates apparent connections between classical pragmatism and the moral sentimentalism of figures such as Hume, Smith, and Shaftesbury. As yet, little research has been done on this connection, despite indications from both Peirce and James that pragmatism is committed to some form of sentimentalism. The work done in this thesis may represent the groundwork for such research. It appears that one key difference between pragmatist sentimentalism and classical moral sentimentalism is the former's evolutionary character. Though pragmatists do hold that our moral practices are in part governed by our feelings and emotions, they also hold that morally relevant feelings evolve through the course of a communities' moral experience, rather than being the product of a universal human nature. Whereas moral sentimentalism is often criticised for presenting a descriptive, rather than a normative, account of moral judgement, it seems as if this evolutionary aspect protects pragmatism from the same criticism. Stable moral sentiments represent the result of an exacting moral inquiry, and as such are more likely to *true*.

The account of Jamesian ethics offered in this thesis, then, challenges existing narratives about the split between Jamesian and Peircean pragmatisms, presents a detailed account of how we can read James as a realist in both the metaphysical and ethical sphere (though one committed to pluralism and to individuals having a role in moral inquiry), and opens up new avenues of research both within contemporary pragmatism and with other traditions.

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