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WILLIAM JAMES AS PHILOSOPHER.

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WHEN the memory of such a human being as William James is still vivid in the minds of all, and a sense of personal loss is strong in all who ever came under the spell of that large and ardent personality,—which means, in some degree, nearly all who ever read so much as a page of his writing,—the time is hardly suitable for a purely logical and impersonal analysis of his philosophical reasonings. It is not, at any rate, such an analysis that I shall attempt, in acceding to the Editor's request for a paper concerning Professor James and his work. On the other hand, the portrait of the man behind the philosophy, especially in the more intimate relations of colleague and neighbor and familiar friend, must be drawn by those who had the inestimable good fortune of knowing him in those relations. But besides the man and the philosophy, there is the philosopher, the man *in* the philosophy. And it is upon the relation between some of the distinguishing traits of William James's mind and the character of his doctrines that I should like to dwell. The first task which the ending of the work of so highly individual a thinker imposes upon the generation he taught is that of endeavoring to see clearly and justly what manner of man he was as he philosophized, to which of the many real aspects of the world his nature was peculiarly apt to respond, and how the content and the emphases, and also the limitations, of his teaching were

affected by the special aptitudes of his intellect and by the characteristic temper of his personality.

“Any author,” said James somewhere in “A Pluralistic Universe,” “is easy if you can catch the centre of his vision.” But, whatever the metaphor may imply, it is not to be assumed that the personal vision of a richly endowed mind, singularly sensitive to the variety and complexity of things, will be focused with such clearness and steadiness that its true centre must be at once apparent to casual observation; we need not expect to find such a mind’s view of the world a perfectly simple and uncomplicated thing. It is certain that the distinctive traits of James’s philosophic outlook are not to be apprehended without some effort of discrimination. There seem to be many who conceive that because he is always easy and delightful to read he must therefore be easy to understand. As a matter of fact, there have been few recent philosophical writers whose meaning it has been so easy to mistake. The qualities which gave to his writing its incomparable vivacity and charm also made it a somewhat uncertain medium for conveying what was, in reality, a tolerably complicated and many-sided, even a rather delicately-balanced, scheme of ideas. This is indicated, though not proven, by the frequency with which of late years James had occasion to complain of radical misunderstandings on the part of other philosophers not sharing his views. Some of this may have been due to the inherent elusiveness of philosophical conceptions as such, some of it to what James described as an innate “inability almost pathetic” of some of his critics to understand him; but some of it also must, it seems clear, be ascribed to certain difficulties in the exposition. There was, indeed, in James’s philosophic teaching nothing that need remain a fathomless mystery to anyone who would consent to compare one part of that teaching with another, to reflect with a little patience upon the meaning of the whole,—and to refrain from a meticulous literalism in construing occasional detached passages in which

the vehemence of the philosopher's temperament had led him to overstate his own case, or his generosity had led him to make too liberal concessions to his adversaries. But the concreteness of his mode of expression and the ardent and impetuous rush of his thought gave to many of his readers the impression that, with *this* philosopher, at least, all such precautions were unnecessary. He who ran, therefore, might—and did—read the author of "Pragmatism" abundantly; but he was not unlikely to read amiss, to suppose the doctrine to be a good deal simpler and more unambiguous than it was.

The needfulness of some circumspection in interpreting James is, again, illustrated by the diversity of types of philosopher which he has been supposed to be, and the corresponding diversity of tendencies of opinion to which, by his writings, he gave—or has been declared to give—aid and comfort. He has been taken for a hard-headed utilitarian, the embodiment of the supposed 'American spirit' of calculating practicality, who would reduce divine philosophy to a meager *Nützlichkeitskrämerei*; and he has been taken for the initiator of a new movement of religious mysticism, who would find a fresh basis for theology in the realities of inner spiritual experience. An influential English religious leader rejects pragmatism as inadequate because he has always "thought of it as the expression on the side of philosophy of the habit of mind engendered by the inductive method and the empiricism of modern science"; a French critic rejects pragmatism because "it means that we can at our leisure deny all science." And as James's doctrine repelled different men for opposite reasons, so it attracted different men for opposite reasons. Many 'naturalistic' men of science found satisfaction in his philosophy because it seemed to some of them simply a generalization of the method of scientific positivism, or to others simply an application of Darwinism to the definition of truth; and many troubled clergymen found satisfaction in his philosophy because it seemed to them to issue to

everybody a general license to believe what he liked or found 'helpful' and to establish his belief upon whatever he might be pleased to call a judgment of value, without too much deference to either logical canons or physical facts. All this cannot, without analysis, be assumed to imply any internal inconsistency in James's own doctrine; but it at any rate implies, if not a many-sidedness, at least a several-sidedness, in his thought. And the problem remains of determining his characteristic personal position and real sympathies amid these diversities of tendency. It might, perhaps, appear sufficient to say that the personally distinctive thing was the catholicity which led him to unify—or to seek to unify—these diverse elements into a single philosophy. There would be some truth in such an observation; but there would also be something misleading. There have been a number of philosophers in the past who have been temperamental peace-makers, determined to make the lion and the lamb lie down together harmoniously in their systems, anxious somehow to find room there for all the tendencies of opinion that normally arise among men. Leibniz was such a philosopher, Hegel in a different way was another. And to such philosophers it not unnaturally happens that their systems, in the hands of their disciples, break up again into the original diversity and discord of their elements. But William James was by temperament no lover either of amiable compromises or of higher syntheses; in matters of belief, as in affairs,—so he wrote in a characteristic early paper,—we are ever confronted with "mutually exclusive alternatives, of which only one can be true at once. The wrench is absolute: 'Either—or!'"

The tendency of James's mode of self-expression to convey certain false impressions, not only about his opinions but about himself, *quâ* philosopher, is in nothing more strikingly shown than in a widely prevalent conception concerning his manner of arriving at his philosophy. He has, of course, done much to give currency

to the idea that any philosopher's doctrines are wholly predetermined by the idiosyncrasies of his personal taste in universes. He has repeatedly observed that the really illuminating thing to ask about any philosophy is not on what professed 'grounds' its author believes it to be true, but why he wishes it to be true. In one of his latest volumes he declared that "the history of philosophy largely bears out" the saying of an eighteenth century writer, that reason was given to men chiefly "to enable them to find reasons for what they *want* to think and do." With such passages in mind, Mr. J. A. Hobson has dubbed pragmatism the "go-as-you-please philosophy." The natural inference has been drawn by many, from the same passages, that the inventor of pragmatism was a go-as-you-please philosopher, caring little how his conclusions were arrived at, if only they were in themselves 'satisfactory.' But the fact,—patent to everyone who will read James's last two volumes in their entirety,—is that there has probably been no philosopher in our time,—indeed, I can think of but few since Kant,—who reached his eventual doctrinal position through a longer or more patient struggle with purely logical difficulties, after a more honest submission to the leading of the argument as he understood it. The stages in James's approach to his final view,—which he reached only in his sixties, after at least thirty years of pretty steady philosophical reading and reflection,—are marked by the solution of definite problems or the elimination of specific false premises; the intervening periods seem to have been filled with painful but undiscouraged flounderings amid unresolved antinomies. James even seems (by his own account, which probably is, characteristically, a little too generous) to have owed the discovery of the way through, at each critical transition, to the insights of others. Thus his revulsion from absolute idealism is arrested for a time by an argument of a younger colleague which he sees no way of controverting; nine years later an article by a friend and former pupil shows him that

this argument is not so cogent as it had seemed.<sup>1</sup> For many years, again, his principal objection to idealistic monism lay in a difficulty based upon grounds of purely 'intellectualist' logic: the difficulty of conceiving how "many consciousnesses can be at one and the same time one consciousness." "I had," he writes, "yielded to these objections against my 'will to believe' out of pure logical scrupulosity. The absolutists, professing to loathe the will to believe and to follow purest rationality, had simply ignored the objections. . . . My own conscience would permit me no such license." Yet the rationality gained by loyalty to this 'intellectualist' principle seemed to be at the cost of irrationality at other points. "Sincerely and patiently as I could, I struggled with the problem for years, covering hundreds of sheets of paper with notes and memoranda and discussions with myself over the difficulty." Finally Bergson, as James conceived, revealed to him the possibility of cutting the Gordian knot.

This tenacious and laborious (even if frequently confused) thinker it is who has been supposed to be the embodiment of intellectual self-pleasing and logical irresponsibility; an eminent English writer has said of him that "abstract argumentation appeared to him futile, and subjects which require it were therefore uncongenial to him. His mind worked by flashes of brilliant insight." In spite of all the hard sayings that may be quoted from him against "abstract argumentation," James in fact devoted much the greater part of his life to precisely that employment; and, on the more fundamental and technical philosophic questions, at least, his "brilliant flashes" were associated with arduous efforts of analytical reasoning. So far may a man's way of expressing his convictions give a false impression of the processes which he has gone through before arriving at those convictions. Whatever be thought of the actual consistency and ten-

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<sup>1</sup> "The Meaning of Truth," p. 22.

ability of James's opinions, it is the simple truth that few philosophers have ever tried to play the game more fairly, with less evasion of troublesome objections, with less haste to arrive at a 'system' by illicit short-cuts. His seriousness and good faith as a philosopher are, again, shown by his exceptionally wide reading in *contemporary* philosophy, by his readiness at all times to enter the lists of technical disputation in behalf of his opinions, and by his willingness to modify the details of his doctrines, to supplement or to qualify them, in response to criticism. At an age when he was entitled to enter upon the ease of the veteran, and after he had come to be in the eyes of the world the foremost intellectual figure in America, and the most widely read of English-speaking philosophers, he continued not merely to write philosophy but,—what is a very different thing,—to philosophize; he would cross lances on equal terms with the youngest dialectician of them all, and,—though often impatient and a little irritated at what he (perhaps too hastily) regarded as wanton miscomprehension,—he accepted correction, when he could see its pertinency, from any quarter, not only cheerfully, but with the handsomest acknowledgments. To some eminent philosophers a system, once shaped and polished, has served chiefly as a pedestal whereon they might mount, to stand there as their own monuments,—in dignified immobility, undisturbed by the current controversies of the philosophic forum round about them. James was incapable of enjoying the monumental posture; he bore his part in the *mêlée* to the last.

It is to be observed, moreover, that James's final philosophy on its practically most significant side,—his personal religious hypothesis,—was avowedly *not* perfectly satisfying to all the cravings of religious feeling; it was not arbitrarily put together so as to embrace all the propositions which it were congenial to human nature to believe, but was the product of a deliberate choice between alternatives recognized as logically exclusive of

one another. A 'finite God' or gods exercising a restricted power,—a struggle of this Power, and of our hopes and ideals, against inexplicable obstructions,—but a fair fighting chance of victory, a working probability that they that be for us are stronger than they that be against us:—this dualistic religious philosophy is not the creed of one who would have scorned to let a little matter of logical consistency stand in the way of the gratification of his religious cravings. James, it is true, was one of those minds that care more that the fight be genuine and strenuous,—and therefore of not wholly predetermined outcome,—than that the triumph be assured; to whose spiritual taste a universe without the biting tang of real risk would seem flat and unpalatable. But he was not insusceptible to the other moods of religious feeling: to the pleasures of the "moral holiday" enjoyable at will by the healthy-minded optimist who believes that because God's in his heaven, *all's* well with the world; to the subtler ecstasy in the mystic's sense of utter oneness with the Infinite One. What is significant about James is that, with an exceptional sensitiveness to all these phases of religious emotion, his logical scrupulosity forbade his fashioning an ontology which should profess to justify them all. And in this he shows a degree of intellectual integrity extremely rare among those philosophers of the nineteenth century who have shown any sensitiveness at all to the religious emotions. The English Hegelians, in particular, ostensible and even ostentatious rationalists though they have been, have nearly always shown an insatiable determination to eat their cake and have it too; have insisted upon combining thorough-going optimism with moral seriousness (than which no two things are logically more incongruous), a sort of evolutionism with the assertion of the perfection and timelessness of ultimate reality, monism with the freedom and responsibility of the individual, a theistic backing for our moral preferences with a conception of the Absolute which makes that entity a mere unselective summary of all the

empirical facts that have turned out or may turn out to exist. James's actual example as a philosopher,—whatever be said of some of his detached utterances,—so far from being an incitement to this sort of spiritual promiscuity, is a standing protest against it. He heard and obeyed, as few so many-sided and abundant natures have obeyed, the voice of that jealous god, the Understanding, with its constant demand for a choice between incompatible alternatives, its 'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve!'

To say, however, that James's philosophical conclusions were not reached without much persistent, open-minded, and intellectually scrupulous reasoning, is not to represent his philosophy as a mere impersonal product ground out by the automatic working of dialectical machinery upon a given mass of raw material. All philosophies,—and it is this that makes the study of the history of philosophy the richest and the most typically humane of the humanities,—are the result of the interaction of a temperament (itself partly moulded by a historic situation) with impersonal logical considerations arising out of the nature of the problems with which man's reason is confronted. Even the most rigorous reasoner must needs have premises; and not even the most conscientious reasoner is likely to see all the premises that there are which are pertinent to so large an argument as that concerning the general nature of things. What each sees will depend upon his personal vision. The impersonal 'necessities of thought,' or seeming necessities, by which epistemologies and ontologies are actuated, are not, as they at first present themselves to different minds, manifest parts of a single scheme; perhaps they may ultimately be harmonized, but primarily they are quite distinct; and one type of mind will seize first upon one, another upon another, for the motive power for its speculative machinery. The fact, then, that William James's philosophy was attained through 'objective' reflection upon the logical issues involved in the

problems with which he dealt, does not imply that it was not also in large measure an expression of the traits of his personality. There were, in fact, two or three characteristics of his mind which gave to his reasonings their starting-point and their lines of direction, and thus went far to predetermine the character of his doctrine. These several tendencies, however, when reflectively developed, led to results not always harmonious with one another. A certain degree of inner discord must be recognized in the original predispositions of his thought, which accounts both for the nature of some of the logical difficulties with which he found occasion to grapple in the course of his reflection and for some residual incongruities which, as it seems to me, remained even in the outcome.

It is perhaps not altogether fanciful to see in that species of elusiveness which, as has been said, belongs to James's style as a writer, a manifestation of the same tendency of mind which constituted the most characteristic and remarkable trait in his endowment as a philosopher. His doctrine is sometimes easy to misapprehend from precisely the same cause which makes his writing easy to read,—and from just the contrary cause to that which often makes Kant's writing hard either to read or to apprehend. Kant, it has sometimes been said, tried to crowd his whole system into each sentence that he wrote, in fear lest the numerous considerations supplementing and qualifying the point which he was at the moment expounding should be even transiently forgotten by his readers. James, on the contrary, was himself prone, in his enthusiasm for the point which he was at the moment expounding, to forget the qualifying considerations which he elsewhere plainly enough acknowledged or even emphatically affirmed. It cannot, I suppose, be denied that he was likely sometimes to overstate the truth immediately before his mind, especially if it seemed to him a truth that had been shabbily treated, a deserving philosophical waif that had been arrogantly

turned away from the doors of all the respectable and established doctrines. To adversaries who were disposed to make the most of his detached utterances he thus offered many an opening for plausible criticisms which yet were, in reality, beside the mark as criticisms of his real—and not unascertainable—meaning. But if this peculiarity of his manner of exposition sometimes aroused unjustified opposition to his doctrines, it also, probably, gave to his doctrines,—or, at any rate, to pragmatism,—a certain appearance of sensational novelty that was not wholly justified either. When the pragmatist formulas about the meaning of concepts or the criteria of truth were set down with all of their qualifying and explanatory clauses explicitly attached to them, they proved to be a good deal less startling and revolutionary than they at first looked; and pragmatism appeared to be not very much more than what its author frankly and modestly called it, “a new name for some old ways of thinking.” The assertion, for example, that the true is “the satisfactory,” or that which “gives the maximal combination of satisfactions,” naturally seemed (according to one’s temperament) a repellent or an engaging paradox; but when it turned out that there are certain “theoretic” satisfactions and “logical demands” which may, when we are bent upon truth, claim precedence of all others, the paradox seemed to have deflated almost to the shape of a platitude. Much of James’s argumentation for pragmatism seems to me to have consisted in repeatedly moving back and forth from the one aspect of that doctrine to the other, first stating the formula *simpliciter*, in its paradoxical guise, then,—especially under the challenge of criticism,—indicating the qualifications and amplifications which he had meant to be tacitly understood from the start. This procedure, however, was certainly not a rhetorical artifice on his part; he always seemed, indeed, to be a little bewildered and vexed by the bewilderment which it caused in some other men’s minds. It was, I cannot but think, one manifesta-

tion (in itself a not wholly fortunate manifestation) of that quality of mind which fitted and predestined him to be the great spokesman of pluralism in philosophy. Just as the Kantian or Hegelian type of philosophic mind cannot bear to let the individual proposition stand by itself, but must ever modify and attenuate and sublimate it through its relation to other propositions, so James could not quite bear to spoil the sharpness and distinctness, the actual individualness, of the individual proposition by immediately huddling it up in the qualifications and provisos and related considerations which he none the less was prepared to recognize on occasion. For though he was very far from blind to the relatedness and reciprocal implications of things, he was also, almost beyond any recorded philosopher, sensitive to the actual aspects of separateness and uniqueness in them; he was not one who believed that any real entity or real truth can be defined wholly in terms of the sum of its relations to other entities or other truths.

There is a quality of physical perception which painters, who much desiderate it, are, I believe, accustomed to call 'purity of eye.' To most of us red is red and blue is blue; and the brick wall yonder, once recognized as a red brick wall, shows to our perception thereafter pretty much the same unvarying shade. But (we are told) to the eye that has retained, or through systematic training has in some degree recaptured, the primitive responsiveness to the actual diversity of color stimuli, even a red wall is scarcely twice quite the same,—but all day long moves through an exquisitely graduated and astonishingly wide gamut of shifting hues. William James brought, not to the physical world, but to human nature and the world of ideas, the artist's freshness and purity of vision. He came to each concrete bit of existence with an unspoiled power of *seeing* the thing as it was, in its unique 'differentness' from other things. Man's ability to classify the objects of his experience is assuredly a convenient faculty; but it also makes for the blunting of

his perceptions,—since, for most of us, to recognize an object as belonging to a familiar class is forthwith to become more or less inattentive to all the characteristics of the object beyond those few flat, hackneyed, generalized ones which enable us to identify the class; it is often, also, to assume that the similarity of the particular object to the rest of the class extends farther than it really does. James's genius lay chiefly in this, that he had by nature,—and retained undiminished to the end of his life,—an extraordinary immunity to the deadening influence of those intellectual processes of classification and generalization in which, in one form or another, scientific and philosophical reasoning largely consist. He kept an unweakened sense for the particularity of the particular,—a sense which the occupations of the philosophical system-builder ordinarily tend in a peculiar degree to atrophy. Thus he was always prepared to see in each individual person, each separate fact, each immediately present aspect of experience, even in each distinct logical category, something unique, unshared, irreducible, ineffably individuated. And toward each new, not-yet-fully-examined fact he always maintained an attitude of liberal expectancy; because it was enough like certain other facts to be classified with them was no reason for assuming that it might not, if given a fair chance, develop wholly novel and admirable qualities and potencies of its own. Uniformities were to be recognized so far as they actually exhibited themselves; but they were not to be allowed wholly to prejudice the case of “the unclassified residuum”; and it was in the unclassified residuum that James's greater interest lay. He was thus predestined by the possession of what may be called a particularistic mind to be a pluralistic philosopher.

Here, no doubt, more nearly than in any other single point of view, lies the centre of William James's personal vision. The temper of mind which I have tried to indicate appeared in his character as a social being as plainly as in his tendencies as a philosopher; as truly in

his attitude toward his fellows as in his attitude toward the universe. The most large-hearted and tender-hearted of men, he showed the characteristic quality of his generosity not so much in his bestowal of material kindnesses,—large and constant and delicately considerate though those were,—as in his unquenchable *interest* in all sorts and conditions of individuals, his whole-hearted appreciation of other men's qualities, and his indefatigable encouragement of their work. This interest in others was not at all the generalized and regularized benevolence of the philosophical 'altruist,' loving mankind in the abstract upon principle; it was not the interest of the moralist, sedulous to edify and to improve; it was only in part the interest of the sympathetic hedonist, rejoicing in the spectacle of the happiness of others or pained at their griefs. It was essentially the interest of a lover of human nature in the concrete and of the richness of its individual manifestations,—especially of the diversity of its intellectual-emotional reactions upon the data of experience. James's capacity for admiration of the intellectual performances of others was astonishing in its range and in its heartiness; not only his old pupils, but utter strangers, neglected Spinozas of the ghetto or Hegels budding unobserved in provincial newspapers, were likely at any moment to receive a letter, or one of his characteristic post-cards, with a few, or sometimes many, words of heartening applause,—applause often too liberal, but not indiscriminating,—evoked by the reading of some piece of work that seemed to him to have in it something of freshness or individuality. The least sign of the emergence in American philosophy, or, indeed, anywhere, of a mind having a quality of its own, possessing novel or distinctive and strongly-marked powers, caused in him a joy like that of a man who had found the pearl of great price. I can even recall once hearing him exclaim with admiring wonder over some examination-papers of Harvard undergraduates which he had been reading. It was not that those productions as a rule

betrayed any extraordinary familiarity on the part of their authors with the subjects with which they were supposed to deal. But the ready ingenuity of these American youth who could, upon so slender a basis of actual acquaintance with the matter in hand, fill so many pages of blue-book with stuff so plausible,—and often conveying such surprising novelties even of misapprehension,—that, to James, was after all a delightful and not altogether unadmirable manifestation of the possibilities of the human mind. All this generosity in appreciation, no doubt, sometimes led him into extravagances; originality was, to him, a mantle that sometimes covered completely a rather great multitude of sins. But this “characteristic excess” of James’s was not only the excess characteristic of a singularly magnanimous mind; it was also the excess of a mind singularly alert to the real differences, the personal and unique traits of the reactions upon life of other minds. Even where he could not share or directly sympathize with those reactions, they had, if honest and serious and not illiberal, scarcely less value in his eyes.

It is, of course, a natural consequence of this that one of the two traits by which James’s more directly ethical writings are chiefly distinguished is an exceptionally vivid feeling for the underived and intrinsic value of almost all distinctive and spontaneous manifestations of human nature, the indefeasible validity of each personal point of view not itself merely negative and destructive of others, the inner significance *for itself*, when lived simply and heartily, of every separate pulse of vital experience. This gospel had been, in a different fashion, powerfully preached before James preached it, by Whitman and by Stevenson,—two lay moralists who, by reason of natural affinity of mind, seem to have influenced him not a little. In the domain of practical ethics the most characteristic thing, as it seems to me, that James ever wrote is the essay “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” the kernel of which consists in certain very happily chosen

passages from those writers. But to him, since he was not simply a lay moralist but a philosopher, the teachings of that essay were merely one practical application of a more general way of thinking. He himself took pains in the preface to the volume containing the essay to insist upon the larger implications of the ideas expressed in it:

The address 'On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings' . . . 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, . . . 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. . . . There is no point of view absolutely public and universal. Private and incommunicable perceptions always remain over, and the worst of it is that those who look at them only from the outside never know *where*.

In this passage is manifest the very process of transition in James's thought from the intense feeling for the individual and the particular characteristic of the innermost temper of his mind to the generalization and formulation of that feeling in a metaphysical doctrine. On the practical side,—to dwell for a moment longer upon that aspect of the pluralistic spirit,—the outcome of this characteristic of James's was that, whenever occasion arose, he always stood as the champion of a "democratic respect for the sacredness of individuality" and of "the outward tolerance of whatever is not itself intolerant." To these phrases, now become somewhat empty and ineffective through much vain repetition, he sought to restore "a passionate inner meaning." It was almost inevitable that one of this temper, in facing the especially difficult contemporary casuistical problem of the treatment of the backward by the 'civilized' races, should be a stout anti-imperialist. He once exclaimed in a certain amazed impatience over the inability of most 'Anglo-Saxons' to see that these 'new-caught, sullen peoples' "really had insides of their own." The consideration from which he could himself never escape was that all manner of individuated entities,—races, persons, ideas,

types of religious experience,—have “insides of their own” never wholly to be identified with any aspect which they may present on the outside; that “no one elementary bit of reality is eclipsed from the next bit’s point of view, if only we take reality sensibly and in small enough pulses.”

There are, however, it is worth while to note, certain tendencies in modern thought, two or three different phases of individualism, to which these pluralistic pre-conceptions of James’s might seem to point, but into which they did not in fact carry him. The special *differentia* of his own sort of “individualistic philosophy” ought not to be overlooked. One familiar type of pluralism in recent philosophy, for example, has been the monadism, or “multi-personal idealism,” represented by such writers as Renouvier, Thomas Davidson, Mr. Sturt, Professor Howison, and, in his earlier phase, Mr. E. D. Fawcett. These men, too, may be said to have developed the spirit of democracy into a metaphysics; for them also there is no single centre of reality that is “absolutely public and universal,” and “the facts and truths of life need many cognizers to take them in.” But the metaphysics of James can hardly be described as a monadology. The motives which lead to that sort of pluralism he did not, for the most part, strongly feel; and the pluralistic inclinations which he did feel did not seem to him to lead to just that sort of pluralism. The independence of the action of each human self from all external causation,—its ‘cut-off’ character and its consequent personal responsibility,—and idea which has, for example, presented itself to Professor Howison very forcibly, was to James hardly a congenial idea. This was partly because his pluralism was combined in his mind with another tendency yet to be mentioned,—his ‘temporalism.’ He was,—if I may so put it,—more essentially a ‘length-wise’ than a ‘cross-wise’ pluralist; it was primarily and more frequently the uniqueness and the creative efficacy of the passing phases in each flowing

stream of consciousness that he had in mind, rather than the timeless discreteness and inaccessibility to external influences of any windowless monads.<sup>2</sup> Discreteness, indeed, was not a category under which it was easy for his mind to represent any concrete entity; though he was, as has been said, peculiarly ready to recognize qualitative diversity and a certain incommensurability in things, it was also highly characteristic of him to think of them as imperceptibly passing into one another and in constant interplay with one another, as somehow immersed, though never dissolved, in a larger stream of being, from which a constant endosmosis takes place. How far this combination of a special sensitiveness to the unique individuating differences of things with a strong disposition (shown in a predilection for metaphors drawn from the properties of fluids) to think in terms of a continuum, led to actual contradiction in James's philosophy, I do not here wish to discuss; but it was, I think, the combination distinctive of his personal type of pluralism, especially in its later manifestations.

Just this combination, however, might perhaps have been expected to produce certain other tendencies of thought in James, to which, once more, he did not in any exceptional degree incline. On the side of his appreciative attitudes, for example,—his moral and æsthetic likings and dislikings,—it might have led to that exaggeration of catholicity in sympathy and admiration which, as it showed itself in a Whitman, amounted to virtual indifferentism, to the professed feeling that each aspect and fragment of reality, as it happens to turn up, is as good as any other—and a bit better; or that, if any choice at all is to be made, the preference must always go to mere bigness or mere intensity of emotion. This 'democratic' spirit towards the diverse elements of human life, as they are manifested in one's self or in others, this doctrine of

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<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps proper to mention that, in a letter to the writer, Professor James himself once adopted this antithesis: "I would also call myself a length-wise pluralist."

the intrinsic equality of all the phases of existence, is, unless off-set by other tendencies, hardly likely to promote the fighter's temper or the reformer's zeal. But from this large, loose, and sprawling attitude of unselective acceptance of things, James was delivered by certain complementary features of his temperament. He had, indeed, as has been sufficiently remarked, an extraordinarily wide capacity for appreciation and sympathy; his first impulse, in the presence of a novel type of fact or person, was to seek to understand and to admire. But he had also a somewhat choleric nature. He had not many, but he had a few strong, temperamental aversions and disgusts; Plato's "spirited part of the soul" was highly developed in him. His tolerance,—as a phrase I have already quoted from him intimates,—did not extend to the toleration of intolerance; anything that savored of cruelty, overbearance, narrowness, awoke in him a hot indignation; for soft and relaxed ways of thinking and ways of living he had a keen dislike; and for overblown intellectual pretense and the spiritual emptiness of a great part of the world's respectabilities he had a penetrating vision and a humorous contempt. Various and intense as was his response to the manifold interestingness of existence, great as was his power to find value in things commonly unconsidered or despised, life presented itself to him, in the last analysis, in a dualistic, a Manichæan, guise,—as a field of combat rather than as merely a source for the promiscuous enrichment of experience or an object of indiscriminating æsthetic appreciation. With all the exceptional breadth and geniality of his nature, there remained a touch of Puritan austerity in him. He had a temperamental need of a certain hardness and opposition in his environment. The world he found a place in which a man is imperatively called upon to take sides.

Nor is there in this any real incongruity with that catholic sense for the distinctive quality of each particular phase of reality, which was his dominant character-

istic. The dualistic aspect, the fighting edge, in James's view of life, was rather an evidence of his power of recognizing real differences. For the very essence of the inwardness of certain items of existence is their antagonism to certain other items. To accept and affirm all reality and call it good, is after all to deny some parts of it; for the inner meaning of some parts lies in their negations. To sympathize equally with powers bent upon the destruction of one another, to be on the side of both Ormuzd and Ahriman, to be one with the red slayer and the slain—is in reality to fail to understand the "inside" aspect of either. The attempt to harmonize such opposites can commend itself only to minds whose vision for the inner distinctiveness of other individual existences has become at least a little blurred through the habit of thinking of things in lumps, who rise so easily to 'higher points of view' that they quite forget that the higher point never truly reveals the observed object's situation as it appears at the object's own level. James's position with respect to the problem of evil was thus a manifestation of that same trait of his nature which was also the source of his pluralistic tendencies. At least some evils,—the sufferings of animals, for example, or certain monstrosities of moral perversion,—seemed to him simply intrinsically and irreducibly bad. They may be triumphed over, they may even be made instrumental to good; but the badness that was in them can never be *aufgehoben*, nullified, or even perfectly compensated. Readers of "The Varieties of Religious Experience" must recall the nightmare-like horror of a passage in which James's extraordinary sense for the reality of the individual is turned upon this aspect of the world:

Our civilization is founded upon the shambles, and every individual existence goes out in a lonely spasm of helpless agony. If you protest, my friend, wait until you arrive there yourself! To believe in the carnivorous reptiles of geologic time is hard for our imaginations,—they seem too much like mere museum specimens. Yet there is no tooth in any one of those museum-skulls that did not daily through long years of the foretime hold fast to the body struggling in despair of some fated living victim. Forms

of horror just as dreadful to their victims, if on a smaller spatial scale, fill the world about us to-day. Here on our very hearths and in our gardens the infernal cat plays with the panting mouse, or holds the hot bird fluttering in her jaws. Crocodiles and rattlesnakes and pythons are at this moment vessels of life as real as we are; their loathsome existence fills every minute of every day that drags its length along; and whenever they or other wild beasts clutch their living prey, the deadly horror which an agitated melancholiac feels is the literally right reaction on the situation.

This, as a reading of animal psychology, is perhaps somewhat overdrawn; but the passage is singularly typical of the vividness in James of what a psychologist might call the ejective imagination. When things of this sort are once seen as palpitating individuated facts there is nothing to be done, James wrote in one of his early essays, but to cry out against all such aspects of reality Carlyle's "Everlasting No." James has sometimes been compared to Emerson,—chiefly for the reason that the two have been the most influential American writers on philosophical themes, and the only two who have had a wide international hearing. But in one important respect James is the antithesis to Emerson. That bland disregard for "those unconcerning things, matters of fact," which has been said to be the root of Emerson's optimism, was impossible to a man with James's type of vision. And since this pleasant Emersonian near-sightedness has become, in certain quarters, a contagious and a noxious spiritual disease, it is fortunate that from the original centre of that infection so potent a corrective has of late been dispensed. James was, to be sure, no pessimist; and the sort of utterance that I have last quoted was never the last word with him. But it expressed a side of the real world which he was convinced was not to be denied nor rationalized away. And the universe could therefore never appear to him, in any final reckoning, as wholly good or as rational through-and-through, but rather as of a mixed character; and above all, of a character largely yet to be formed. That process of formation involved, to his mind, purification and elimination as well as enlargement and enrich-

ment. And both results depended for their realization in great, perhaps in a decisive, measure upon the present and future loyalty of human agents to the not-yet-attained ideals which they mysteriously find within themselves,—to “the demands which the self of one day makes on the self of another,” to the “imperative goods” whose “nature it is to be cruel to their rivals.”

These last considerations, however, already bring to mind a second (not wholly separate) characteristic trait of James’s personal mode of apprehension of reality,—the only other such characteristic which it will be possible to consider here.<sup>3</sup> He was one of those in our day who have most fully and clearly realized that the primary peculiarity of conscious experience is its flowing, temporally successive character; that this ‘time of inner experience’ is a unique *quality* of existence, not to be re-

<sup>3</sup> It would have been worth while, if space had permitted, to note the influence of James’s ‘particularistic’ sort of intellectual vision in some of his more special and technical metaphysical doctrines,—especially in his earlier view (which, for reasons briefly indicated later in this paper, he eventually abandoned) of the impossibility of ‘compounding’ states of consciousness, and in his logical theory of the ‘externality of relations’ which seems to have had an important part in the development of the ‘new realism.’ But these matters, in any case, lie somewhat aside from the special province of this journal. There was a third strain in James’s thought,—less potent, yet significant,—which should at least be mentioned: the nominalistic and simplifying temper, the desire to translate abstractions into “concrete particulars of somebody’s experience,” the demand for the rigorous elimination of all obscure and redundant notions. On one side of him, James continued the succession of the great British nominalistic empiricists, the prophets of the law of intellectual parsimony, such as William of Ockham, Berkeley, Hume. In certain moods of his reflection he became, incongruously, very much what the French call an *esprit simpliste*. Thus he seeks to reduce the concepts of ‘God,’ ‘freedom,’ and ‘immortality’ to their “positive experienceable operation” and so finds that “they all mean the same thing, *viz.*, the presence of ‘promise’ in the world.” This trait is not strictly contradictory to James’s dominant characteristic; it is rather the negative side of the same sense for concrete, particularized reality. Yet it tended, unquestionably, to work against the pluralistic spirit; for it naturally predisposes to the nullification of real differences and the too speedy reduction of multiplicity to unity. James’s ‘particularism’ gave birth to two children, the pluralistic and the nominalistic tendency; and these two sometimes came to be at variance in his mind.

duced to anything else nor described in terms of anything else; and that no philosophy can be adequate which virtually ignores (as most of the historic philosophies have ignored) the primacy of the temporal quality of experience as a starting-point for the interpretation of the nature of reality and the meaning of truth. Readers of James's earliest philosophical essays must already have seen what aspect of human existence, what sort of moment in life, presented itself to him as the central and illuminating fact, the point at which we have reason to suppose that the inner nature of reality is most directly revealed to us. This is the moment in which a man looks before and after, faces the future *as* future, and knows that that future, as yet a field of alternative possibilities, is to be defined and shaped, that certain of those alternatives are to be forever shut out from real existence, by the decision now in process of forming itself in his mind. Now, just as the methods and preoccupations of both science and philosophy have tended to lead thought away from the particular to the generalized, so they have tended to lead thought away from the truly temporal,—from the uniqueness of the unprecedented and unrepeatable single moment in the time-flow,—to fix it upon the eternal or the immutable or the identically recurrent. Logic has been interested in changeless concepts, metaphysics in the absolute and eternal, science in unvarying laws, in qualitatively immutable 'primary' properties of bodies, in quantitatively constant sums of matter and energy, in 'causes' conceived as capable of 'presenting themselves as the 'same' over and over again in perfect indifference to mere diversities of date as such. Except by certain idealistic metaphysicians, the reality of time has not been denied; but most that makes up the actual temporality of time and its significance in our inner experience has been commonly disregarded, not only by philosophy and science, but even by theology and religion. James's vision of the distinctiveness and the validity of the 'particular' point of view was complemented by an equally

keen sense of the validity and the distinctiveness of the temporal point of view. And his task as a philosopher was that of stirring up his contemporaries to do justice to these two primary yet neglected aspects of existence.

This 'temporalism' showed itself in a number of items of James's philosophy, though, until he became interested in the work of Bergson, he hardly seems to have been so explicitly conscious of the decisive part it played in his own thinking as he was of that played by his pluralistic preconceptions. It was already apparent, however, in the "Psychology," and in some of his early untechnical essays of more than twenty-five years ago. The core of the "Psychology," and the part of it having the most general theoretical significance, lay in the chapter on "the stream of consciousness"; and that chapter (which contains the germ of a very considerable part of James's subsequent philosophy), together with the chapter on "the sense of time," was primarily an attempt to penetrate by means of an introspective analysis,—as Bergson in his earliest work was at the same time seeking to penetrate,—to the essential *differentia* of our time-experience. James's chief originality as an empirical psychologist lay in his emphasis upon the transitive character of mental states and his abandonment of all 'static' psychological elements. In him, again, as in Bergson, the predominance of the temporal point of view led at once to the affirmation of a somewhat new form of indeterminism and to more or less new arguments for it. The "Dilemma of Determinism," for example, expresses primarily these contentions (though they are, perhaps, not wholly disentangled from other considerations): that, if two alternatives present themselves as equally possible before a choice is made, it is pure dogmatism to say that this beforehand view of the facts is any less valid than the *post factum* view which regards all save the *fait accompli* as *having been* impossible,—since the two views are merely the natural products of two different temporal

situations; that, further, if we are to ask which view is the truer, the one which exhibits to us more correctly the nature of things, we have reason to give the preference to the beforehand view, since not only the whole meaning of our active life, but also the one legitimate escape from a pessimistic despair of the universe, depend upon the maintenance of the absolute distinction between the possible and the necessary and of the reality of possibilities which are yet *mere* possibilities. In the same essay James vigorously attacked the neo-Hegelian conception of a timeless, all-knowing mind, and made the pregnant remark that "to say that time is an illusory appearance is only a round-about manner of saying that there is no real plurality, and that the frame of things is an absolute unit. *Admit plurality, and time may be its form.*"

Pragmatism itself, though it was many other things also, was primarily epistemological temporalism. It proposed to define 'meaning' and 'truth' in terms of intertemporal relations between successive phases of experience. They had usually been defined in terms which either ignored temporal distinctions of before and after or expressly professed to transcend all such distinctions. Some sort of 'cross-wise' relation had been taken to constitute the nature of truth,—some correspondence of a judgment with its object or with the eternal knowledge of an absolute intelligence; James undertook to make the whole matter one of 'length-wise' relations. A judgment made by a human being, he insisted, is always and essentially an act of a creature standing at a specific moment in the time-flow, facing the future, preparing in some way for that future by means of the activity of judging, and himself moving forward into the future even while he judges. So greatly, indeed, was James impressed by this aspect of the judging-process, that he occasionally seemed to forget the fact that the past and the simultaneous are also phases of the temporal, and that it obviously will not do to define the import of a

judgment or the nature of truth in a way which prevents judgments from truly referring to these phases,—which tries to metamorphose the whole meaning of pastness and contemporaneity into pure futurity. The passages in which James expresses himself to this effect must, I think, be regarded as exaggerations and partial misapprehensions of his own insight into the significance for epistemology of the temporal and mainly forward-facing and anticipatory character of our thinking. But it does not belong to the purpose of this paper to enter into a discussion of pragmatism. As illustrations of James's temporalistic way of envisaging things his over-statements of his insight are even more pertinent than any more qualified expression of it.

It was, finally, through his own and through Bergson's reflections upon the paradoxes involved in the nature of temporal process that James was chiefly led to that extreme form of 'anti-intellectualism' which characterized his final phase,—to the doctrine of the radical incongruity between 'conceptual thought' and the nature of reality as immediately apprehended in our time-consciousness. This outcome of his temporalism seems to me to imply a rather striking departure from one of the earliest manifestations of his pluralism. At the beginning of his career he was the most vigorous of representatives of the good old eighteenth-century respect for the principle of contradiction, which Hegelianism seemed to be undermining. The categories and fundamental notions of our mind were each distinct and unsublated; they did *not* become "their own others." Again, states of consciousness of two finite centres could not be metaphysically compounded so as to make one unified consciousness. But in the later chapters of "A Pluralistic Universe" James seemed to recant the logical doctrine of the essay "On Some Hegelisms" and to imply that reality may be, not merely opaque to the intellect, but even self-contradictory. It should be said, however, that this

matter James seems to have regarded as not definitively clarified and formulated in his own mind.<sup>4</sup>

It is time to conclude. In the light of this consideration of James's characteristic traits as a philosopher, it is perhaps possible to determine in some degree the significance and the historic place of his contribution to philosophy. Doubtless the chief service which he rendered to those of his contemporaries, especially in England and America, to whom philosophy was a serious concern, was of a sort so general and pervasive that it is not easy to define. It lay in the bracing, stimulating, and mind-enlarging influence of his personality, in the contagion of openness of view and simplicity of utterance, of intellectual courage and intellectual candor, that proceeded from him; in the example of his constitutional inability to wear any bandages of either scientific or philosophic dogmatism over that vision turned straight to the face of immediate experience, of "raw, unverballed life" in all its manifoldness and concreteness and richness of unexcluded possibilities. He touched nothing which he did not vitalize; and more than one ancient discipline and age-withered problem, upon contact with the robust and hearty piece of human nature that he was, took on new life, as by a transfusion of blood. But the more specific and perhaps the more permanent significance of his contribution to philosophy consists,—as it seems to me,—chiefly in this, that he brought to the vo-

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<sup>4</sup>This seems to be shown by some sentences of his own on the point, written scarcely more than a year ago, in reply to some comments of the sort that have been set down above: "I think you take an extravagantly exaggerated view of my anti-logicality. . . . I imagine that much war will be waged by many combatants in print before Bergson's thesis gets settled to general satisfaction. All that I contend for is that things *are* as continuous as they seem to be and that the intellectualist arraignment of experience as self-contradictory and impossible won't pass. If continuity and flow mean logical self-contradiction, then logic must go." Some of the recent mathematical logicians, James added, consider that they have "saved logic by the 'new' infinite. Perhaps they have, and if so, the better. But I wait to be convinced."

cation of the philosopher an almost unequaled power of *seeing* these two generic aspects of reality: the uniqueness and inwardly self-authenticating character of concrete individual existences, the irreducibility of their being and their natures to any mere external relations to the wholes with which they may be connected; and the uniqueness and the primacy of the temporal quality of experience, the impossibility of translating this *quale* into any non-temporal categories, or of ever truly describing the innermost nature of reality as we know it by means of such categories. Now, philosophy begins with things seen, with *aperçus*, not with things inferred; I do not mean, of course, with physical observation, but with the direct *noticing* of some general and logically pregnant trait of the conditions of experience or the data of thought. It does not, indeed, end with *aperçus*; nor did James's activity as a philosopher so end. He devoted himself, as I have already said, conscientiously and laboriously for many years to the work of focusing his vision more sharply upon these aspects of reality, of following out their implications, of correlating them in a logically definite manner with one another and with older and more familiar philosophical ideas which he recognized as considerations not to be neglected. The success of this attempt at precise formulation and elaboration could be suitably discussed only after a lengthy technical examination. However great or small its success, it is not in it that James's more notable service as a philosopher has been rendered. The growing points in the history of thought come when a man arrives upon the scene with a new or a neglected *aperçu*— and the power to tell about it. James belongs among these philosophers of fresh vision, of distinctive personal insight into fundamentally significant aspects of the facts of our experience. His work may very well prove to have opened a highly important new chapter in the history of philosophy, at least among people of English speech. For,—as he himself said, speaking in praise of another,—“originality

in men dates from nothing previous, other things date from it, rather.”

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## THE PLACE OF LEISURE IN LIFE.\*

B. BOSANQUET.

I PROPOSE to throw my remarks into a form which may not quite correspond with what was expected from my choice of a subject. But I do believe my treatment will touch the essence of the matter, and it will attempt to bring home to us the inner meaning of a great book, to which it seems to me that even expert scholars hardly as a rule do justice.

I want, then, to lay before you a popular account of the unity, or what I love to call the plot, of Aristotle's "Ethics"; the great work in which he studied, not individual morality as contrasted with politics,—but the nature of the true aim of life for man, as contrasted with the methods of statesmanship, by which it might be impressed upon and embodied in the civic organism. To me the subject is fascinating. The gradual development of the great teacher's thought, the depth of meaning which reveals itself in formulæ which taken unintelligently by themselves seem the very type of abstractions and emptiness, and are so considered by critics of repute,—all this is to me a never-ceasing delight. Whether I can in any degree impart my feeling of the matter remains to be seen. Of course, I omit technicality and tell you things as I understand them. I owe my leading conception to Professor Burnet's edition of the "Ethics" and certain points also to that of Professor Stewart; and the former has himself stated an idea of the same type in his book on "Aristotle's Theory of Education."

\* An address to the Cardiff Educational Society.