

*COMMENTS**

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I would like to thank Prof. Croce for inviting me to comment on this session, and Prof. Moller for his willingness to read (and fetch) my comments. It has been a privilege to read the papers, and I regret not being able to attend the session.

I will comment on the papers individually, beginning with Prof. Croce's paper. Paul Croce reminds us that, in addition to offering the contributions to the disciplines of philosophy and psychology, for which he is best known, William James also "thought outside of disciplinary lines of work." Inter alia, James addressed audiences who did not think within the disciplinary framework; sang the praises of "undisciplinables"; and at times used the kind of simple, non-technical, even picturesque language, which gave the shivers not only to his enemies, but also to some of his friends. He also "used metaphors to illustrate his theories," a practice which Prof. Croce associates with "undisciplined thought," in contrast to scholars who, instead, highlight the function of metaphors in well-established rhetorical traditions within specific disciplines.¹ Finally, James engaged in ways of thinking, which, Prof. Croce claims, were characterized by "conviction", rather than by "inquiry," the latter being for Prof. Croce a marker of disciplinarity. While other scholars have interpreted some of these features of James's work as illustrations of interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary modes of knowledge production, Prof. Croce suggests that we read these and other aspects of James's work as examples of what he calls a "pre-disciplinary" or a "non-disciplinary" stance." The difference is not only terminological. Both "interdisciplinarity" (a research mode in which an individual resorts

to the tools offered by a variety of disciplines) and “cross-disciplinarity” (in which “individuals from different disciplines” cooperate on projects of common interest)² presuppose disciplinarity. Disciplinarity, in turn, according to Prof. Croce, is predicated on dualism, on the assumption of a “dualist shape of the world.” In contrast, James’s pre-disciplinarity was “supported” by what Prof. Croce calls James’s “non-dualism.” The latter is a multi-faceted notion characterized by a willingness to think “before” binary distinctions, such as science and religion, but also material and immaterial, natural and supernatural, phenomenon and noumenon, subject and object, mind and body.

Prof. Croce, however, does not contend that James’s “non-dualism” led James to eliminate or erase the terms of the binary oppositions, such as “subject or knower” and “the object known.” These terms, instead, co-existed “in intimate relation” as “features of the same ‘pure experience.’” “Non-dualism,” he continues, “did not displace dualism.” Similarly the paper suggests that James’s “pre-disciplinary” thinking did not translate into the dismissal of the disciplines; on the contrary, in James pre-disciplinary and disciplinary work “existed alongside.” James even occasionally “mingled” those research modes, for example by proposing a “place for conviction within inquiry,” and by directing “his inquiries into conviction.”

The paper provides important tools for approaching James’s work and invites readers to search for examples of co-existence of dualism and pre-dualism, of disciplinarity and pre-disciplinarity in it. James’s theory of the emotions, at least as presented retrospectively by James in 1902, provides an example of the coexistence of dualism and a pre-dualist way of looking at things. The main claim of the theory, according to which the physiological “expression” of an emotion precedes the emotion as

a mental state, rests on the ability to discriminate between bodily and mental changes. In 1902 James retrospectively surmised that the “whole literature of the James-Lange theory” proved that emotions are “simultaneously affections of the body” and “of the mind.” Yet, in the same article James also used his theory of emotions to illustrate his anti-dualist “central thesis” that outer and inner, “subjectivity and objectivity, are affairs not of what an experience is aboriginally made of, but of its classifications.”³

The coexistence of dualism and pre-dualism in James’s retrospective reflections on the James-Lange theory raises the question of the origin of James’s anti-dualism. Anti-dualism in this example seems to be tightly linked to James’s metaphysical monism, according to which, as David Lamberth put it, “experience is prior to mind/matter,” this and other kinds of “splits[s]” being “built out of” the “pulse of pure experience.”⁴ Lamberth suggested that this type of monism became important to James in the mid-1890, rather than in the early 1900s, as previously thought. Would Prof. Croce want us to push further back the emergence of James’s metaphysical monism? Or, instead, shall we resist the temptation of associating closely non-dualism with metaphysical monism, and consider non-dualism as a much broader concept, of which metaphysical monism is only an illustration?

If I read it correctly, the paper associates ontological dualism with a dualism of perspectives and endeavors (e.g. science vs. religion), as well as more broadly with disciplinarity. But did James and his contemporaries necessarily look at disciplinary divides as “epiphenomena of deeper boundaries in the conventional wisdom about the dualist shape of the world,” as prof. Croce suggests? And, conversely, was pre-dualism always the correlate of pre-disciplinarity? In the Lowell lectures, for example, a form of

mind/brain dualism (as expressed in the claim that we own both a body and a mind) does not prevent James from inviting his interlocutors to practice a kind of science that would study both the mind and the body, ignoring the “fence” that physiologists and introspective philosophers were erecting to separate their adjoining “lots” in the field of knowledge. Here mind/body dualism does not translate into disciplinary partitions.⁵

To my mind the main insight offered by Prof. Croce’s paper is that James valued pre-disciplinarity because it facilitated the project of “confronting experience afresh,” that is, before imposing on it the conceptual nets produced, among other agents, by the disciplines, which, Prof. Croce suggests, James viewed as tools for organizing experience. James’s desire and willingness “to meet experience” directly in a non-dualist way is, according to Prof. Croce, ultimately what propelled James to “cross disciplines,” and, presumably, engage in the kinds of inter-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary projects that other scholars, including myself, have ascribed to different motives.

Prof. del Castillo’s paper, in contrast, presents a solidly “dualist” James, as far as philosophical typologies are concerned. It enriches our understanding of the relationship between James and Santayana by examining the different ways in which they laughed. And it uses the “contrast between an *ironic* temper and a *comic* temper” to complicate our understanding of one of James’s binary distinction between philosophical types: the “cynic” and the “sympathetic” tempers. Since Prof. del Castillo emphasizes “the importance of ‘portraits’ to understand philosophical differences,” I think it is fair to describe his project as belonging to a “history of portraits.” This kind of historiography includes a history of “temperaments,” if, by temperament we understand, with William James, and, in fact, with most late 19th-century psychologists, something rooted less in

the Kantian domain of culture than in the Kantian domain of nature: in other words, a person's temperament, as Kant offered and James and many of his psychological colleagues accepted, is what Nature makes of that person, rather than what a person can make of himself.⁶ Vladimir Jankélévitch, in his reflections on irony, capitalized exactly on that conception of temperament. Playing on the assonance between "humeur" (the Galenic bodily fluids) and "humour" ("l'*humour*, c'est-à-dire l'humeur"), he linked the idea of humor with that of temperament.⁷ Given that temperament, according to James is rooted in the constitution of the nervous system, and that it guides a person's ways of perceiving and "reacting to" the universe by means of physiological, perhaps even mechanical processes, it would seem that one can no more cultivate, say, a cynical temper, than get rid of a generalized anxiety disorder (pace cognitive psychologists). A "history of portraits", then, seems to capture the kind of person "one is", rather than the kind of person one desires or strives to be.⁸

Professor del Castillo's project, however, bears also similarities to a different kind of historiography of philosophy, namely the history of philosophy as a way of life. One could perhaps call this strain of Prof del Castillo's paper a "history of characters," accepting late 19th-century psychological theories according to which character belonged to the Kantian domain of culture, rather than to that of nature: in other words, character is what a person makes of herself, rather than the kind of person one is by nature. In this mode, Prof. del Castillo notes, we could take James's "description of the sympathetic character as an ethical view, or as a conception of good life," even as a practical template for self-transformative action by means of which a person could modify his/her ways of perceiving and dealing with nature and society. In this mode Prof. del Castillo notes that

the dispositions associated with the “cynic” and the “sympathetic” tempers can be cultivated: “ironists *try* to feel detached from facts, whereas comic tempers become absolutely involved in facts, *trying* to cope with them as they go along.”⁹ The cultivation of habits and of the emotions here serves as a philosophical exercise. Prof. del Castillo’s paper seems to suggest that, to some extent, “cynicism” (as defined in the paper) and a sympathetic approach to the cosmos, nature, society, and oneself can be regarded as prescriptions for cultivating both certain ways of acting toward others and oneself, and certain ways of perceiving the universe, nature, and society. In other words, cynicism and the sympathetic approach to reality may be regarded not only as innate, natural temperamental traits, but also as modes of life, dispositions one can somehow intensify by resorting, for example, to the techniques for the cultivation of the will, of character, and of the emotions which were ubiquitous in turn-of-the-twentieth-century psychological and self-help literature. Humor too, both of the ironic and of the comic variety, appears to be a philosophical practice. Humor, prof. del Castillo notes, breaks down routines and functions an “agent of solidarity.” Irony instead, is a technique for generating distance and estrangement from reality and/or from the self.¹⁰

There are plenty of (now rather old-fashioned) “histories of portraits” and plenty of histories of philosophy as a way of life. What makes prof. del Castillo’s paper especially interesting is that it combines the two approaches. His is, at once, a history of portraits and a history of philosophical exercises; a history of the kind of person one is and a history of the kind of person one hopes to become; in short – if we accept for a moment late nineteenth-century psychology-- a history of temperaments and a history of characters. My question for Prof. del Castillo is whether the opposition between cynic

and sympathetic tempers is ultimately as irreducible for James as, if I read him correctly, he suggests it is. Can a cynic person ever become a “sympathetic character”? If not, how can James present the sympathetic type as an ethical guide? Or is that kind of “good life” possible only for people who are “sympathetic” by nature?

James’s politics of psychopathology, as analyzed by Dr. Sutton provides a genuine example of both a pre-dualist and a pre-disciplinary way of thinking: not only did James blur the boundaries separating health from morbidity, but he also showed the occurrence in healthy people’s everyday life of traits that, in a different context, might be regarded as pathological. With Dr.

Sutton’s and Dr. Goldman’s papers we switch to the theme of politics. After the initial wave in the 1980s and 1990s of works, which “politicized” William James, depicting him variously as a communitarian anarchist, a supporter of corporate socialism, a producerist, and more, in the last few years several scholars have expanded our understanding of how James may have been politically involved, by examining several cases of politics by other means. To give just a few examples, Jeff Sklansky has argued that, by redefining freedom as psychological freedom, James’s theory of the will suggested the possibility of reconciling ‘mental autonomy’ with material dependence. Sklansky does not necessarily agree with an earlier scholarly tradition, according to which the “new psychology” necessarily functioned as a set of blinkers, which “anxious intellectuals” could use in order to “avert their eyes from the alienating effects of industrialization.” Nevertheless he is keenly aware that James’s psychology, by reconceiving “political-economic dynamics as psychological phenomena,” “carried a profoundly political burden.”¹¹ Richard Gale, instead, has examined the political valences

of James's "great account of the lovers Jack and Jill," showing that it promoted respect for the sacredness of individual life and James's "principle of democracy, requiring us to respect other persons, even nations, and to adopt a live-and-let-live hands-off policy."¹² To give one last example, Deborah J. Coon analyzed James's interventions into the politics of medicine, the politics of psychical research, the politics of "normal" psychology, and, more generally, the politics of academia. She highlighted how, with those interventions, James aimed to combat the intolerance, "encroaching hegemony," disrespectful and patronizing attitudes of regular physicians, of the holders of the PhD title, and of many experimental psychologists.¹³ Dr. Sutton's paper on James's "politics of psychopathology" expands these analyses, by unveiling James's interventions on behalf of the mentally ill.

The politics of psychopathology, as Dr. Sutton argues, were especially important to James, who suffered from nervous insomnia, back pain, and bouts of neurasthenia, and thus viewed himself as belonging to "the social category" of the mentally "invalid." The paper shows that James's politics of psychopathology represented, at least in part, a response to the diffusion of aggressive theories of degeneration, which threatened to assimilate nervous disorders, such as those from which James suffered, to the extreme and unwelcome diagnosis of insanity. In contrast, James praised the social usefulness of the mentally ill and encouraged his contemporaries to "approach the morbid regions of human nature with, 'a certain tolerance, a certain sympathy' and 'a certain respect.'" Here it would have been interesting to consider not only James's theories, but also his (to be sure quite limited) clinical practice. For example, in 1890 James endeavored to 'treat' a case of double personality. The patient, an itinerant preacher named Ansel Bourne, had

suddenly disappeared from his home in 1887. Two months later he found himself in a different town, where he had been living under the name of “A. J. Brown.” While some clinical psychologists would have likely tried to suppress one of the two personalities, or aimed to subsume the least desirable personality within the more desirable one, James instead worked to preserve both. By means of hypnosis he endeavored to stage an encounter between the secondary personality and the wife of the primary personality, in order to make each personality aware of the existence of the other.¹⁴ While the therapy failed, this case illustrates how important, for James, it was to tolerate and respect not only the mentally ill, but even their parasitic or alternate personalities.

I can only address two points made in the paper. First Dr. Sutton shows that James challenged the idea of the existence of a clear-cut demarcation separating “health” from “morbidity,” in an effort to promote tolerance for the mentally ill. Challenging the distinction actually was not an unusual move in the late nineteenth century; for example, Theodule Ribot, in *Diseases of Personality*, established a continuum between mental health and mental morbidity. Yet one may wonder whether blurring the divide between the pathological and the normal could be necessarily, or univocally, reassuring. The episode of panic fear, which in *Varieties of Religious Experience* James famously ascribed to a “correspondent” of his, comes to mind. One evening, “whilst in a state of philosophical pessimism and general depression of spirits about [his] prospects,” James’s correspondent suddenly experienced a “horrible fear” of his “own existence.” “Simultaneously,” the narrator recounted, “there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum.” The realization that the difference between himself and the “idiotic” patient was a “merely momentary discrepancy”

engendered “such a horror” of the epileptic patient, that the narrator “became a mass of quivering fear.” Retrospectively the narrator concluded that the experience made him “sympathetic with the morbid feelings of others ever since,” thus eliciting precisely the kind of response James was hoping to promote, as Dr. Sutton shows, by blurring the divides between the healthy and the pathological. Yet, the price to be paid for that sympathy was high: the “fear was so invasive and powerful,” the narrator continued, “that I thought I should have grown really insane. He “awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of [his] stomach,” and for months “was unable to go out into the dark alone.”¹⁵ Whether the narrative described something James actually experienced, or whether it was James’s “contribution to family tradition of writing philosophically pithy ghost stories,” as Ruetenik suggested,¹⁶ one can wonder how James could expect his publics to be able to reconcile the vastly different emotional effects – horror of similarity and sympathy for the potentially similar-- engendered by the assumption of a continuum linking mental illness to mental health. At stake here, as well as in James’s second strategy – namely, the suggestion that the same behavior could be regarded as healthy in one context and pathological in another—was not only the normalization of morbidity, but also the pathologization of the normal. Furthermore, such a move, as James could not fail to appreciate, could result in the further expansion of the power domain of asylum superintendents and medical experts.

The second question is about James’s suggestion, in his drafted letter to Rockefeller, that insanity be reconceptualized as a functional disease. By redefining insanity as a functional disease, Dr. Sutton suggests, James not only hoped to remove the stigma that surrounded that disease, but also aimed to make it into a disease “which is

susceptible to mental healing methods.” Both points are well taken. Yet, one wonders to what extent the concept of a functional disease could do the labor Dr. Sutton suggests it did. In turn-of-the-twentieth-century America treatment for functional diseases was still prevalently somatic. Consider for example the prototypical functional disease, “neurasthenia.” While neurologist George Beard was willing to involve the patient’s mind as a “therapeutic means” in the cure of this ailment,¹⁷ most American neurologists, the medical group which most clearly subscribed to the concept of functional nervous diseases, still remained committed to somatic therapies. These included, e.g., diet, electricity, medication, rest, as well as treatments humiliating for the patient, such as forced feeding (both through the mouth and through “rectal injections”). Can Dr. Sutton tell us more about the actual use of mental therapies by American neurologists and other American medical practitioners committed specifically to a functional understanding of certain mental illnesses?¹⁸

Coming now to Loren Goldman’s paper, this paper belongs to a revisionist scholarship, which in the last few years has complicated our understanding of the political implications of William James’s philosophy. Anthony Marasco, for example, has shown that, far from leading necessarily to a defense of democracy, in some social and cultural contexts, such as early twentieth-century Italy, James’s pragmatism could in fact lead to a denial of democracy and to forms of proto-fascism.¹⁹ Dr. Goldman reminds us that even the single apparently most democratic feature of James’s philosophy – namely pluralism – appeared to some of James’s readers as leading to fascism.

My question is about the exact nature of the relationships between Sorel’s syndicalism and James’s pragmatism, especially James’s theory of truth. Dr. Goldman

notes that “Sorel ... considered himself a Pragmatist of a certain sort.” Yet Sorel was incensed when the Italian pragmatist Giuseppe Prezzolini, in a 1909 book on syndicalism lavishly praised by the syndicalist Benito Mussolini, depicted Sorel as a pragmatist.²⁰ Sorel had portrayed Prezzolini as a master of “mendacity”; he had contended that pragmatism led to “artificiality and even duplicity.”²¹ Sorel’s diagnosis in fact was absolutely correct in the case of Prezzolini’s and other Italian incarnations of James’s pragmatist account of truth.²² Yet precisely those versions of James’s pragmatist theory of truth were the instrument of choice that Prezzolini and other Italian pragmatists used for the intensification of action— a goal which they shared with Sorel as well as with William James. Can Dr. Goldman further explain how Sorel viewed the relationships between his syndicalism and James’s pragmatism, especially James’s account of truth? More precisely, did Sorel, like the Italian pragmatists, posit any links between “the Pragmatic method in determining truth” and the goal of the reinvigoration of action?

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NOTES

**Editor’s Note:* These comments respond to the papers as they were presented at the conference. Each author had the opportunity to revise his paper in light of these comments before publication. Emma Sutton’s paper, which is mentioned here, is published elsewhere.

¹David Leary, for example, provides examples illustrating how psychology, as well as a variety of “physical, biological, and social sciences have developed on the basis of certain root, or founding, metaphors.” See David Leary, “Psyche’s Muse: The Role of Metaphor in the History

of Psychology,” in D. Leary, ed., *Metaphors in the History of Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 14.

² See Richard H. Roberts and James M. Good, “Introduction. Persuasive Discourse in and between Disciplines in the Human Sciences,” in Roberts and Good, *Recovery of Rhetoric: Persuasive Discourse and Disciplinarity in the Human Sciences* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), p. 6.

³ James, “The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience,” in James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism. The Works of William James*, F. Burkhardt gen. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 71.

⁴ David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 80.

⁵ It may be worth noting also that several, among the many turn-of-the-twentieth-century philosophers and scientists who tried to reconfigure existing frameworks of disciplines, avoided predicating disciplinarity on ontological dualism, or on ontological regionalism. At the turn of the twentieth century important plans for the classification of the sciences suggested that sciences as different as physics and psychology dealt with the same subject matter, but from different points of view. For a discussion of turn-of-the-century debates on the advantages of classifications of disciplines “by point of view” rather than “by subject-matter” see, e.g., E. B. Titchener, *Systematic Psychology: Prolegomena* (1929).

⁶ See, e.g., Sergio Franzese, *L'uomo indeterminate. Saggio su William James*, Rome: D'Anselmi, 2000

⁷ V. Jankelevitch, *L'ironie*, Paris: Alcan, 1936, p. 106.

⁸ I have discussed the distinction temperament and character in late nineteenth-century psychology in “The Psychology and Physiology of Temperament: Pragmatism in Context,” *Journal for the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 2001 (37): 3-26.

⁹ Emphasis added.

¹⁰ Some of James's philosophical contemporaries – including some of James's European followers -- used it as a philosophical technique in order to produce effects of distance, as well as to prove by action the bankruptcy of both metaphysical and psychological determinism. Bordogna, “Asceticism and Truth: The Case of ‘Magic Pragmatism,’” Berlin, Max-Planck-Institute für Wissenschaftesgeschichte, pre-print 404, 2010.

¹¹ Jeffrey Sklansky, *The Soul's Economy. Market Society and Selfhood in American Thought, 820-1920* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), pp. 142-143, 146.

¹² Richard Gale, *The Divided Self of William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 248. On this point see also Charlene H. Seigfried, "James: The Point of View of the Other," in S. B. Rosenthal, C. R. Hausman, and D. R. Anderson eds., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, 85-98.

¹³ Deborah J. Coon, "Courtship with Anarchy. The Socio-Political Foundations of William James's Pragmatism," Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard, 1988.

¹⁴ James, *Principles of Psychology. The Works of William James*, F. Burkhardt gen. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), vol. 1, p. 371.

¹⁵ James, *Varieties of Religious Experience. The Works of William James. The Works of William James*, F. Burkhardt gen. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, YEAR), 134.

¹⁶ Tadd Ruetenik, "Social Meliorism in the Religious Pragmatism of William James," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 2005 (19), 3: 238-249. Quotation on p. 239.

¹⁷ George Beard, "The Influence of the Mind in the Causation and Cure of Disease – the Potency of Definite Expectation" (1876), discussed in Eric Caplan, *Mind Games. American Culture and the Birth of Psychotherapy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 93-95. See also Barbara Sicherman's classical article "The Uses of a Diagnosis: Doctors, Patients, and Neurasthenia," *Journal of the History of Medicine*, January 1977, 33-54.

¹⁸ Eric Caplan persuasively argues that although "common sense suggests that there might be some causal relationship between the discovery of functional nervous/psychical diseases and the advent of psychological therapies, little evidence exists in support of this position." (Eric Caplan, *Mind Games*, op. cit., p. 45) Far from stemming from the concept of functional disease, Caplan argues, the birth (or return) of psychotherapy in America was prompted by Christian Science and the mind-cure movement, in which, as is well known, James was quite interested. James did indeed challenge "somaticism" (Caplan, 98), together with a "loose-knit" and "elite" group of professionals who were pioneers in treating mental diseases that had no organic basis." (E. Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States*, New York: Scribner, 1983; quoted in Caplan, op. cit., p. 98; the group, as Taylor has shown, included James's friends James Jackson Putnam and Morton Prince, and James's former student Boris Sidis). Nevertheless in the first decade of the twentieth century mental therapy still bore the stigma associated with Christian Science and the mind-cure movement.

¹⁹ Anthony Marasco, “Papini’s Corridor: Pragmatism, Democracy, and the Lure of the Irrational in the Later Work of William James,” Ph. D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2003.

²⁰ Giuseppe Prezzolini, *La Teoria Sindacalista* (Naples: Perrella, 1909), 273. Benito Mussolini, review of Prezzolini, *La Teoria Sindacalista*, *Il Popolo*, May 27, 1909. (Reprinted in E. Gentile ed., *Mussolini e ‘La Voce’*, Milan: Sansoni, 1976.)

²¹ See Prezzolini, *La teoria sindacalista*, 247-253.

²² Prezzolini retaliated and in a letter to Benedetto Croce depicted Sorel as “a pragmatist who writes bad things about pragmatism.”