

CHANGING THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL SUBJECT:
WILLIAM JAMES'S PSYCHOLOGY
WITHOUT BORDERS

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Abstract: Why has James been relatively absent from the neopragmatist revival of the past twenty years? I argue that part of the reason is that his psychological projects seem to hold little promise for a socially and culturally progressive philosophical project, and that his concern with religious issues makes him seem like a religious apologist. Bringing together James's psychological writings with his philosophical writings shows these assumptions to be wrong. I offer a reading of "The Will to Believe" and *The Principles of Psychology* to support my position (a) that James's philosophical methodology and his psychological works lend themselves to a naturalized approach to philosophical inquiry, which both allows for a reshaping of traditional philosophical questions and offers a check on scientism, and (b) that, contrary to many commentators' claims, James is not defending religion against science but is instead using science to address epistemic and moral issues more broadly. I conclude with a discussion of the ways in which James's naturalism demands a reconsideration of the nature of philosophical inquiry, as well as a revised view of a scientific psychology that avoids scientism.

Keywords: pragmatism, psychology, belief, voluntarism, methodology, science, naturalism, epistemology, self, feeling, emotion, religious hypothesis, evidence, habit, attention, cognition.

Many philosophers love William James, but many of those same philosophers will tell you that he got most things wrong.¹ Why would anyone love a philosopher who got most things wrong? Owen Flanagan says it is because James allows us to "watch" a real person struggling with big questions, a whole person, trying, as Flanagan says, "to keep all the things we need to believe in play at once" (1997, 25). The general sentiment seems to be this: William James is a fun read, but unfortunately he's a bad philosopher.

Psychologists, on the other hand, appreciate James to a much greater degree. For the most part, James is seen as an important founding father

¹ See, for instance, Flanagan 1997.

of a number of psychological schools, and psychologists are, in general, more generous in their evaluation of James's theories. It is as if there are two Jameses: William James_{phil} and William James_{psych}. In fact, if identity is understood as textually mediated, there are two different Jameses. Philosophers, with the exception of philosophers of mind, generally do not read *The Principles of Psychology* or *The Briefer Course*, and psychologists generally do not read James's essays on pragmatism and truth, free will, or that old standby of introductory textbooks, "The Will to Believe." When my friend the psychologist refers to William James, I am not at all sure that we are referring to the same person in any but the most trivial sense. She has in mind the author of ground-breaking work in experimental psychology, who developed a theory of the emotions that is still thought to have much to recommend it. I, on the other hand, think first of the philosopher who wrote interesting articles on experience, truth, and religious belief—not, perhaps, entirely correct theories, but interesting and fun to read nonetheless.

James's near absence from the neopragmatist revival in philosophy can, I think, probably be explained by both of James's personalities. Progressive philosophers who look to pragmatism for resources for a socially and politically relevant philosophy distrust the naturalism and what they take to be a behaviorist streak in James_{psych}. In addition, they are pessimistic about the prospects for finding something useful in the religiosity and spiritualism that pervades much of James_{phil}'s writings. Less progressive philosophers might be willing to accept the naturalism but not the religiosity, and they are still unimpressed with James's philosophical acumen generally. My essay is directed to the former group primarily. I shall try to make a case for James's importance to neopragmatist progressivism. I shall show that there are significant resources in James's work for establishing a socially and politically progressive critical tradition in philosophy. Appearances to the contrary, James does offer us a way of recasting philosophical problems that should lead us to think more broadly about what philosophy as a discipline can be.

The gist of the essay is this: bringing William James_{phil} together with William James_{psych} changes the parameters of traditional epistemology and, in particular, gives us a different model of what a "naturalized epistemology" might look like. A Jamesian naturalized epistemology will look less like a project in computational neuroscience and more like an epistemology that assumes a more generalized psychological realism that can also accommodate human values, projects, and lived realities. This, I want to suggest, provides us with a new way of doing philosophy that promises to keep philosophy in the job of cultural critique while also drawing on the resources of the natural and social sciences. By the same token, however, it requires a reconstruction of psychology and the social sciences in line with a different view of science and inquiry.

Intellectual Temperament and Passional Nature: William James and the Coercive Nature of Affect

William James tells his audience of Harvard men, gathered to hear him speak on intellectual responsibility and “the religious hypothesis,” that he intends to defend the following provocative thesis: “Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds” (1979, 20). James goes on to explain to his audience that the “objective” attitude that insists on empirical evidence before committing to what he calls the “religious hypothesis” is itself an example of our “passional nature” deciding on such an option, and that the inquirer who alternatively accepts the religious hypothesis is no more and no less irresponsible as a knower than the redoubtable Clifford who is the occasion for James’s talk.

James’s provocative thesis has become a certain kind of touchstone of literature on how and whether we have volitional control over our beliefs. Yet even those philosophers sympathetic to James have commented that James seems to have gone overboard here. Richard Rorty claims that James has missed an important pragmatist move in the argument:

This nice sharp distinction between the cognitive and the non-cognitive, between belief and desire, is . . . just the sort of dualism which James needs to blur. On the traditional account, desire should play no role in the fixation of belief. On a pragmatist account, the only point of having beliefs in the first place is to gratify desires. [Rorty 1997, 88]

Richard Gale laments that James seems to have been satisfied with a questionable “debater’s victory” over the materialist Clifford in this talk, and although James’s theory is “not true in general” (Gale 1999, 81), it can be salvaged. Gale argues that while James’s equation of willing, attending, and believing leads him to careless and overreaching claims, nevertheless in especially complex moral cases where we vividly imagine several competing “life-scripts” we do, in effect, willfully believe. But, Gale claims, James’s unfortunate effort to generalize his theory of the willfulness of belief is primarily meant to bolster a theodicy. Daniel Hollinger (1997) goes so far as to accuse James of constructing a strawman version of Clifford’s argument, arguing that James saw his role as the defender of Protestant religiosity in the face of a scientific outlook that threatened to undermine religious belief. In this battle between science and religion, Hollinger implies, James the scientific psychologist and philosopher is doing battle on behalf of religion.

Contrary to Rorty, Gale, and Hollinger, I am not at all convinced that James is interested in arguing that we can control our beliefs when he claims that our passional nature may and does decide such things for us. This is partly because I am not convinced that James is guilty of the slip

into the cognitive/noncognitive dualism of which Rorty accuses him and which Gale invokes as well. My aim in the first part of this essay is to show how an understanding of James’s theory of emotion really does “fuzz up” the distinction between the cognitive and the noncognitive—the pragmatist move Rorty believes James has missed. The secondary effect of my argument, though, is to put into question the claims that Gale and Hollinger (among scores of other philosophers) make about James’s motivations. The claim that James is trying to bolster a theodicy or defend a religious outlook from an encroaching scientific conscience becomes much more troublesome if we understand James’s point in “The Will to Believe” as *both* a philosophical and a scientific point.

Rorty’s reading of “The Will To Believe” is, like many readings of that paper, a misreading—a very common misreading—one, in fact, that has passed into the literature as the “conventional wisdom” with respect to James’s theories. Part of the common misreading of “The Will to Believe” is a reading that takes James’s argument to be a philosophical argument about the ethics of belief. While it is true that it is *secondarily* a discussion of the ethics of belief, it is primarily a work of descriptive psychology. In this respect, it is continuous with James’s approaches in *The Principles of Psychology* and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In each of these works, James begins with “case studies” from which he draws out psychological explanations and philosophical insights. James’s point in presenting this descriptive psychology is to show not that we can believe at will but that, on the contrary, the sum of the workings of our “passional nature” suggests that we do not have control over what we believe. James’s theory of emotion, when read in conjunction with his theory of belief, sheds light on how our “passional nature” in fact *constrains* our believings. The ironic point of “The Will to Believe” is that in the face of “live hypotheses” we cannot will *not* to believe, and an ethics of belief must answer to the facts of our psychological nature.

Belief and Emotion

James makes explicit the connection between emotion and belief in his chapter “The Perception of Reality” in the *Principles of Psychology*. There he tries to show that, phenomenologically, belief is simply a certain kind of feeling, and that it is “more allied to emotions than to anything else”; we come to believe something when the object of belief “fills the mind solidly to the exclusion of contradictory ideas” (1950, 2:283). That James thinks emotion and belief are two different manifestations of the same phenomenon seems to be beyond question. How could this unlikely (to philosophic minds) equation seem compelling to James?

James is making two points here, which both connect to his theory of emotion: (1) belief is a kind of attention, an absorption of consciousness

by the object (considered in this way, James says, the opposite of belief is not disbelief but rather doubt or “coldness” to an idea), and (2) attention is a species of emotion.

According to a cognitivist theory of emotion, in which emotions are taken to be judgments or species of judgment, neither of these claims can make much sense.² But for James, emotions are the bodily reactions that alert us and serve as data for our judgments. The noncognitivist theory of emotion, identified with James and his fellow psychological researcher, James Lange, is usually dismissed by philosophers as the “tingles and feels” theory of emotion, inadequate because it assimilates emotions to bodily states.³ James’s initial statement of his theory of emotion, put as provocatively as his thesis in “The Will to Believe,” has become famous:

Our natural way of thinking about these coarser emotions [e.g., grief, fear, rage, love] is that the mental perception of some fact excites the mental affection called the emotion, and that this latter state of mind gives rise to the bodily expression. My theory, on the contrary, is that *the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur is the emotion.* [1950, 2:450]

Behind what seems like a bald and unsophisticated statement of behaviorism James has actually hidden a rather compelling—and surprisingly contemporary—account of the psychophysiological elements of emotion. According to James, there is an immediate bodily response to a state of affairs (a “perception”), and the whole organism responds to the various changes of the body that accompany this perception. Emotion, James argues, is at base a physiological phenomenon with psychological inflections. Emotions serve as “somatic evaluations”⁴ of our environment, triggered by particular interactions with the world that alert us and call our attention to the part of the world in question. Our consciousness is directed toward the object of the emotion, and we label the feeling “anger” or “fear.” Emotions are the bridge between physiology and psychology, between mind and body.

This theory of emotion implies that a variety of things many philosophers and anthropologists claim cannot be called emotions are,

² As an example of such a theory, see Nussbaum 1990 and Solomon 1980.

³ For such criticisms, see Solomon 1980 and Shweder 1984; for a summary of such criticisms, see Griffiths 1997.

⁴ This is a term that Jesse Prinz used in his discussion of emotions in the Book Discussion Session for Paul Griffiths’s *What Emotions Really Are* at the Meetings of the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, on December 28, 2000. I do not know if the term is yet in the literature. Damasio 1994 uses a similar term, “somatic marker,” which seems to refer to a slightly different phenomenon. While Prinz’s term refers to an automatic response to a current state of affairs, Damasio’s term refers more broadly to bias devices (173–74) that can occur not only in the face of an actual state of affairs but also when one imagines other possible states of affairs arising subsequent to certain decision paths.

in fact, emotions: the startle response, sheer terror, generalized anxiety and wonder are all emotions, according to James’s theory. And so, in a way, is belief.

James says that belief is like emotion in important respects. It is a “conviction” of truth—a certain kind of resonance—that absorbs and directs our attention. Beliefs yield the field of consciousness only when a competing belief with its own feeling of veracity enters the field, and, in its turn, claims our attention.

The “feeling” of conviction that characterizes belief—the way in which our attention is dominated and our consciousness filled by the object of belief—is what makes belief so like emotion. And like emotion, belief is a bodily response, an interaction between the organism and the world.

Yet how can it be that all beliefs are bodily responses? That simple empirical beliefs are bodily might have some initial plausibility, but applying this analysis to more abstract beliefs—specifically, in this case, the “religious hypothesis”—would seem to require stretching the theory beyond the bounds of plausibility and beyond the limits of its applicability.

Indeed, James does admit that there is a difference between the feeling of veracity that attends empirical beliefs and the feeling that accompanies more abstract hypotheses, but the difference is not what one might think, and it is not so great a difference as one might expect. I shall deal with this difference later in this section, and a bit more in the next section.

What is common to the feelings of reality in each case, however, is that in each case the feelings signal a certain kind of relation between the self and the object of belief, be it a hypothesis or an object of sensory perception. When we believe something, it is primarily in virtue of its “relation to our emotional and active life” (1950, 2:295). Our emotional and active life is rooted in our bodily self, but it is also what James refers to in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* as “the habitual center of our dynamic energy” (1982, 196). What we care about, what we attend to, what interests us are all parts of our passional nature, but they are not psychic mental phenomena. Rather, they are physiologically based orientations and feelings that serve as organizing grids for experience. The self or ego is essentially a bodily ego and perspective, James insists. And though this is not all that we are (1950, 1:301), the sense of self is necessarily anchored in the body and exists as a point of transaction between the psychic and the physiological and between the mine and the not-mine. This is true, James says, even of my “spiritual self”: the sense of “spiritual activity” is “really a feeling of bodily activities whose exact nature is by most men overlooked” (1950, 1:302).

The self is the crossroads where experience arises and is translated into action. Experience arises at this crossroads not only because it is selves that *have* experiences, metaphysically speaking; it is also here that

experience is constructed and shaped by attention, habit, perspective and interest, psychologically speaking. But the self also provides the inquirer with a perspective on the world that sets the frame for relations of relevance and serves as the basis for interest and attention. The self is necessarily a bodily self, according to James, but its interests are not merely materialistic, and its role as the organizing grid for experience and action is not limited to simple stimulus-response reactions. It is at the crossroads of the self that experience is sorted into "worlds"—the material world, the spiritual world, the moral world, and so on. Thus, spiritual and material interests do not come to the self "prepackaged" but are themselves constructed. The primary difference between simple empirical beliefs and "the religious hypothesis" rests on the fact that we refer empirical beliefs to the material world, and the religious hypothesis to another world or worlds. The "feeling" of truth is a physiologically based reaction to the relative importance of the objects or ideas presented.

At the close of his chapter "The Perception of Reality," James gives us intimations of the paper he will present eight years later as "The Will to Believe":

If belief consists in an emotional reaction of the entire man on an object, how *can* we believe at will? We cannot control our emotions. Truly enough, a man cannot believe at will abruptly. Nature sometimes, and indeed not very infrequently, produces instantaneous conversions for us. She suddenly puts us in an active connection with objects of which she had till then left us cold. "I realize for the first time," we then say, "what that means!" This happens often with moral propositions. We have often heard them; but now they shoot into our lives; they move us; we feel their living force. Such instantaneous beliefs are truly enough not to be achieved by will. But *gradually* our will can lead us to the same results by a very simple method: *we need only in cold blood ACT as if the thing in question were real, and keep acting as if it were real, and it will infallibly end by growing into such a connection with our life that it will become real.* It will become so knit with habit and emotion that our interests in it will be those which characterize belief. [1950, 2:321]

We can indirectly achieve control over our beliefs by acting as if the object of belief is real, but we cannot simply will to believe in something, because we cannot will ourselves into "feeling" it as true. We can only will to act *as if* the object in question (or the proposition in question) were true. We have volitional control over the orientation of the body and over our actions that gives us an indirect control over the experiences of the body and the self, and thereby gives us indirect control over our believings. But effecting control over belief can only be achieved through interest, which is, again, a way of relating the object of belief to the self. Things become real to us only insofar as they are organically connected to our passional nature, because, says James, reality is itself a kind of experience of feeling. It is the way an idea "stings" us, he says, that distinguishes it from an object of our imagination, from fictional objects,

or from hypotheses that leave us "cold." And an idea "stings" us insofar as it finds a place on the organizing grid provided by the self—not a metaphysical or ghostly self, and not simply a logical posit, but a lived and bodily self. So we shall be "stung" by objects in our perceptual field, by threats to our well-being, and by hypotheses that meet our aesthetic, moral, and epistemic interests.

Construals

To try to show what might be plausible about James's assimilation of emotion and belief, consider the analysis of "construals" that has appeared in theoretical discussions of moral perception and in theories of emotion. For the most part, theorists who have tried to articulate the significant role that construals play in moral perception have focused on the ways in which construals are ways of seeing a situation that impart immediate "moral knowledge."⁵

Roberts provides an analysis of construals in his discussion of emotion that seems to me to be most Jamesian, and a short digression here will help us see how James's seemingly unpromising theory is actually more promising and helpful than it appears at first blush.

Construals (Roberts 1988; Tolhurst 1990; Blum 1994) or "seeing-as" (Alston 1991) are ways of attending to, or focusing on, certain aspects of a sensation or experience. The seeing-as relationship, argues Alston, is primitive; it cannot be reduced to or explained in terms of beliefs, conceptualizations, or cognitive frameworks. Roberts explains a construal as a "characterization of an object or the way an object presents itself" (1988, 191–92). "Verisimilar concernful construals" (191) also have the appearance of truth for the subject and are inflected with a certain kind of concern. It is for this reason that Roberts characterizes construals as a species of emotion—they involve both concern and seeing-as.

Verisimilar concernful construals seem to be what James has in mind in his discussion of the ways in which we are "stung" by an object presented to us. The "concernful" piece finds its answer in James's insistence that what has the appearance of truth for us must have all the following characteristics: (a) it must "sting" us—it must "feel real"; (b) it must absorb our attention; (c) it must become a part of our habits and engage our interests. In the case of an object of perception, it must be something we focus on in a certain kind of way rather than something peripheral to our field of vision. If it is a hypothesis, it must engage our ongoing interests rather than leave us cold.

⁵ This is a very rough summary of a variety of discussions. I cannot do justice within the scope of this essay to all the positions that have used the idea of construals or the phenomenon of "seeing-as." For those interested in the rich literature in this area, see Blum 1994, DePaul 1993, and Tolhurst 1990.

Those things that can appear to us in this way—as verisimilar and concerned—are delimited by our patterns of attention and ongoing interests and engagements with the world. Our “passional nature” here constrains what has the sting of reality for us because it determines the patterns of attention and interests we bring to our inquiry. Yet, our passional nature “constrains” without entirely determining our believings, because change is always possible. James refers to “conversions” above—these are dramatic and radical breaks with our preestablished habits, but they are mostly involuntary. And while James says that these are “not infrequent,” not everyone is capable of “conversion” (1982, 204). Those who are not seem to be incapable of them because of their intellectual temperament, says James.

Attention and Temperament

“Each thinker has dominant habits of attention,” says James, “and these practically elect from among the various worlds some one to be for him the world of ultimate realities” (1950, 2:293). Some thinkers are constitutionally incapable of entertaining “the religious hypothesis,” he observes. This is partly due to intellectual temperament and partly due to habits of attention, and while these seem to be related, it is not clear exactly how. What James means by “intellectual temperament” is rather difficult to pin down. It involves at least certain kinds of learned habits of attention, but it seems also to include certain kinds of habits of expectation. So, for instance, James contrasts the “optimist” and the “pessimist” not only in terms of personality but also in terms of ways of looking at evidence and constructing experience. It is in this respect that Clifford’s claim that it is irresponsible to believe in God in the absence of evidence for the hypothesis misses the mark, according to James. The sting of reality that attends the religious hypothesis for some inquirers might never be experienced by others who are constitutionally incapable of entertaining its truth. The dominant habits of attention developed by the materialist will not allow the religious hypothesis to become even remotely alive or stinging. James tells us that for some people religious ideas can never become the “center of their spiritual energy”—the focus of their attention and the basis for their actions and interests—because of materialist inhibitions, a lack of imagination with regard to the invisible, or “the agnostic vetoes upon faith as something weak and shameful, under which so many of us today lie cowering, afraid to use our instincts” (1982, 204). There are also those who lack a spiritual sensibility, no matter how much they envy those to whom faith and spirituality come easily. They lack a certain kind of ability, says James, to have religious experiences (1982, 205).

Yet again, though, we may have ways of indirectly changing those habits. If we “meet the hypothesis halfway” (1979, 31) the evidence might

make itself apparent to us. By shifting our dominant patterns of attention, or at least interrupting them in their incessant and coercive constriction and construction of our worlds, we might open up the possibility of new forms of experience, new stings of reality. Similarly, says James, the person who acts as if the whole world were full of untrustworthy souls will have his experience confirmed, simply in view of the fact that his dominant patterns of attention will overlook counterexamples (or reinterpret them so that they cease to be counterexamples) and will emphasize confirmatory experiences.

So while we can voluntarily and indirectly exert control over our patterns of attending, we cannot willfully ignore that which has the sting of reality for us. Although we may be able to open up the possibility of other kinds of feelings, other patterns of attention, we cannot willfully and voluntarily choose not to believe in verisimilar concerned construals, or, in James’s terms, that which seems to have the sting of reality. Thus the inquirer who is stung by the religious hypothesis cannot will not to believe it, on pain of irrationality. That those of us with different kinds of intellectual temperament do not feel its sting does not make the believer intellectually irresponsible. If, as James says, that believer fears that by not meeting the hypothesis halfway—by not willing to act as if the hypothesis were true—he might be closing off the opportunity for having the kinds of experiences that would confirm it, he is responding to some sting of reality he has felt from the hypothesis. The materialist Clifford fails to see that even in his own case, his passional nature—his materialist temperament, his well-developed habits of attention to the material world, and his lack of imagination with respect to the invisible—has determined his beliefs. The kind of evidence he would notice would never serve to confirm (or, for that matter, infirm) the religious hypothesis.

That belief is related to feeling means that it is not an all-or-nothing affair. We may feel relatively stung or “unstung” by the object or hypothesis in question. The relative strength of the sting we feel is related to the relative reality we accord it. Belief, then, is a matter of degree.

Again, what is different about James’s theory of belief is that, contrary to contemporary discussions, James uses “belief” to refer not to a mental item, like a representation, but rather to a psychophysiological experience.⁶ In addition, this psychophysiological process is grounded in the sense of self, which is also based on bodily perspective and feeling, integrating the experience I have of the world with my already existing patterns of attention and intellectual temperament.

In “The Will to Believe” James is trying to explain to his audience why someone might feel constrained at least to meet the religious hypothesis

⁶ Gale (1999) is evidently on to something when he says that for James belief is an action; but his analysis fails to take into account the relation between James’s discussion of belief and his theory of emotion.

half way. Our passional nature *may* decide between the religious hypothesis and its nullification because it *must*. In other words, it is permissible normatively for our passional nature to determine between these options because our passional nature is already implicated in both the materialist's and the religious person's beliefs and evaluation of the evidence.

The claim that the facts of our psychology determine to some extent what we are able to believe, and that our passional nature is what makes these determinations, might seem to be at odds with James's defense of free will in "The Dilemma of Determinism," but I don't think that it is. As James makes clear in that essay, all that he thinks he needs to establish in order to show that we are free is that chance exists—that is, when we take ourselves to be electing one option from among two or more different options, then the options that we do not take exist as "real possibilities." In order to establish this, he tries to show that fatalism—the belief that all decisions are determined in advance, and that we are mistaken if we think that the "path not taken" ever existed as a real possibility—is false.

We might (justifiably) accuse James of constructing a straw-man argument here, since not all determinist positions amount to fatalism. But the more important point for my purposes is that, at the end of the essay, James uses the analogy of the chess game to show that even if the outcome of the game is foreordained because one player is better than the other, it does not mean that the two players do not make real choices along the way. That is, even if our intellectual temperaments make some kinds of decision more likely than others, this does not mean that we make no real decisions. Thus, anything felt to be a real decision is a real decision, and so in this case physiological constraint does not entail determinism. The situation is similar with respect to James's claims in "The Stream of Thought" in *Principles*, in which he claims that we are selective in our attention to the world and thus "mold" our experience the way a sculptor creates a sculpture out of raw material. As James says, "The mind . . . works on the data it receives very much as a sculptor works on his block of stone. In a sense the statue stood there from eternity. But there were a thousand different ones beside it, and the sculptor alone is to thank for having extricated this one from the rest" (1950, 1:288). While, in some sense, the sculptor's interests and habits of attention meant that this sculpture was the one that she would end up with, nevertheless all the other possible statues exist as real possibilities. But our interests *practically* select from among the possibilities this one. And as Reed (1997) argues, James's way of making a case for the efficacy of the will is by making a case for the efficacy of interests in deciding between competing ideas or constructions of experience.

But James's commitment to Darwinism also commits him to the position that interests are part of nature (Reed 1997, 206), and so James's naturalistic story of mind means that the only way to salvage the possibility of real decision making is by, in fact, recognizing the working

of interests. But interests, again, are naturalized. I think it would be fair to say that James actually ends up asserting the fact of causation and arguing that only if our interests cause our decisions can they really be free. The mind, after all, is not a theater of sensations for James but is the psychological process of selection (Reed 1997, 207).

There are no purely intellectual grounds for coming to believe a particular hypothesis, even for the unbelievers. James's discussion in "The Will to Believe" is meant to show us how, from a psychological perspective, the cognitive and the noncognitive cannot be pried apart, and so, contrary to Rorty's criticism, James has quite thoroughly fuzzed up that distinction. In addition, contrary to Hollinger's criticism, James does not seem to be playing the role of defender of the faith against the encroachment of a scientific sensibility but rather uses the resources of scientific psychology against a mythology of scientism that he takes to be implicit in Clifford's argument. In effect, he out-Cliffords Clifford.

Changing the Subject of Epistemology and Ethics, and Reconstructing Philosophical Inquiry

James is giving his audience a descriptive psychological account of the case of one who is compelled by the religious hypothesis and one who is not. The upshot is that neither has any real choice in the matter. In fact, if we accept James's psychophysiological analysis of emotion and belief, the distinction between the cognitive and the noncognitive, between belief and desire, becomes difficult to discern. Instead of saying, with Rorty, that desires are the only justifications for beliefs, we shall refer the questions posed by the ethics of belief to a descriptive psychology, and the question "Can we believe at will?" will seem to signify a deep confusion about human epistemic practices and the boundaries between the different items that function in human psychology. The second part of the essay shows how epistemological questions change shape if we accept James's naturalism. James's naturalism, tempered as it is by his commitment to a theory of cognition that grounds it in a lived self, fuzzes up the distinction between epistemology and ethics. Thus, the "subject" who philosophizes is naturalized; in addition, the subject of philosophy becomes less clearly marked off from the social sciences and the natural sciences, while the sciences must, in turn, recognize the reality of normativity in human life.

Objections to a Pragmatic Naturalism

One objection to following James down the naturalism road, however, is that James's theory, so construed, runs into the same problems as naturalized epistemology generally: it does not allow us to distinguish what we do in fact believe from what we ought to believe. The descriptive

and the normative are much less easily pried apart in an epistemological story that begins with the assumption that our psychological constitution is essential to our epistemological strivings.

The way to address this objection is to focus on the pragmatic value of our epistemic strivings. For what reason do we seek to know whether some particular thesis is true? It is not simply that we want to know what's true—it is also because our beliefs are instrumentally valuable. They can be instrumentally valuable in that they are true and allow us to get along in the world better, or they can be instrumentally valuable because they improve the quality of our lives in some significant way, or, in some cases, both. I take it that one of the main points of James's pragmatic musings on truth is to point out that some beliefs have instrumental value even if we can't (even in principle) determine their truth-value—not, as some have understood his position, that false beliefs can have instrumental value.⁷ In the case of the religious hypothesis, a case in which the truth-value of belief in God is indeterminate, and perhaps indeterminable, James wants to call attention to the ways in which the pragmatic values of our epistemic strivings are not always reducible to a single measure (that is truth) and that our psychological constitution reflects the fact that epistemic goods constitute an irreducible plurality, rather than a unity, and that they are inevitably bound up with “moral” issues, broadly conceived.

This, I take it, is the import of Flanagan's observation that James is trying to keep all the different things we need to believe in play at once (Flanagan 1997, 25). It also seems to be implicit in the “real-life” case study approach James uses to talk about epistemic issues. These are not abstract cases of trying to justify a belief that “I see a table” or, even more abstractly, “I see a k at time t_1 ”, but are stories of deliberations that draw in all the different considerations and concerns of human life. They are full-blooded, rich, and detailed snippets drawn from life. Sometimes, as in the cases elaborated in *The Principles* and in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, they are cases that James has himself observed or heard tell about; sometimes, though, they seem to be autobiographical. James's methodological approach displays his commitment to the thesis that epistemic issues are tied up with moral and spiritual issues, and both of these are connected to our lives as organisms. Insofar as our psychological capacities are connected to our functioning as organisms that strive for a variety of different goods, we cannot pry apart our psychological capacities from our epistemic and moral strivings.

⁷ I do not intend to say that this position is not implied by James's theory—it may well be that, given the “plurality of goods” analysis, false beliefs might turn out to have other redeeming value, and that falsehood doesn't trump other epistemic goods. I only mean to make the more circumscribed point here that if this is an implication of James's position, he does not seem to have been thinking about it as such.

Another objection to this position is that a naturalized approach that draws on a Jamesian psychology of knowledge threatens to undermine the distinction between reasons for and causes of belief, and that such a distinction is essential to philosophical inquiry. That is, while our psychological constitution might be an explanation of how we come to have certain beliefs, it does not justify those beliefs and is not an acceptable philosophical story. But if we think, as I think James thinks, that it is “naturalism all the way down”—that our psychological constitution is as it is because of the variety of epistemic and moral goods we seek—then the distinction between reasons for belief and causes of belief is only a distinction between an account in terms of how we actively justify our beliefs to others versus how we come to have those beliefs, and it is not clear that the former is the subject of James's epistemological project. Furthermore, it is not clear that the latter is beyond the ken of philosophy. If it is naturalism all the way down, then the difference between reasons and causes is not a difference in kind but a difference in frames. The issue of reasons for belief must be addressed within a frame that takes seriously research in the social sciences as well as work in experimental psychology.

James's naturalized approach to philosophy generally, however, requires not only that philosophers enlist the social sciences and psychology in philosophical inquiry, it requires also a shift in the kinds of problems philosophers take as their starting points for philosophical inquiry. Rather than beginning with an analysis of a simple empirical belief (for example, “I see a table”) and then applying a naturalized analysis, a pragmatic naturalized philosophy will begin with contextualized experiences or problems that are freighted with meaning and values. And while some of these experiences might be common everyday experiences, others will be more marginal: they may be considerations and analyses of conversion experiences, mystical experiences, political commitment, or “irrational” states like those that populate the pages of Oliver Sacks's case studies. A pragmatic naturalism must take seriously the whole kaleidoscope of human inquiry and action, from the experience of emotions to the quest for broader meaning in life.

Philosophy and Psychology Reconstructed

A naturalized pragmatic approach to philosophy, however, will not seek a reductive analysis of human epistemic and moral problems to an equally reductive psychology that accounts for all such problems and their solutions in terms of brain physiology, since the pragmatist move here complicates the story not only of philosophy but also of psychology and the relationships between the lived human body and the mind to which it is organically connected. Just as philosophers must take into account the facts of our psychology, so psychology must take into

account the facts of our epistemic and moral lives in a way that does justice to their place in our vastly complicated, teleological interactions with the world. Our answers to philosophical and psychological questions will involve an equally intricate interweaving of the normative with the descriptive, in which both will be transformed.

In summary, James's philosophical and psychological identities can be brought together to open up new ways to do philosophy, as well as new ways to pursue scientific disciplines. I think the model James provides for a progressive neopragmatist program is richly suggestive of not only the ways in which philosophical inquiry could become engaged in moral and political issues but also the ways in which the progressivism that has characterized much neopragmatism can be wedded to projects in the natural and social sciences. That is, appeal to the sciences need not be politically regressive or reductive if we understand the ways in which our existence as physical beings is always inflected by our existence as metaphysical beings. Similarly, the philosophical problems with which we grapple are tied to our physical as well as intellectual existence and, just as important, to our lives as they are lived out in terms of our political, moral, and epistemic commitments.

According to this view of philosophy, the discipline cannot insulate itself from the project of social amelioration; neither can it insulate itself from the natural and social sciences. But since these, too, require reconstructing in light of James's nonreductive naturalism, progressive neopragmatists need to work not only on metaphilosophical issues but also on meta-issues that underwrite the disciplinary identities of the sciences. The first project cannot succeed without the second. A progressive neopragmatist movement in philosophy requires the reconstruction not only of philosophy but also of the physical sciences and the social sciences. This is the work that lies ahead for pragmatism.

We do have some examples of this kind of reconstruction, I think; I mentioned Oliver Sacks's work earlier in the essay, and this seems to me to be a promising model for a "new psychology" that goes beyond scientism by treating human value commitments and moral life as central to a discussion of psychology. Antonio Damasio's analysis of different kinds of reasoning and decision-making tasks is another example. Damasio uses the notion of closeness to or distance from what he calls "the personal core" (1994, 168–69) to develop a theory about the role of emotion in cognition. The late Edward Reed's work on "ecological psychology" (Reed 1996) and his history of the emergence of psychology (Reed 1997) are models of exemplary interdisciplinary research that exhibit both a deep understanding of philosophical literature and depth in his own field, psychology. Reaching a little further afield into issues that postdate James's work, the dialogue between Carl Elliott and Peter Kramer in the Hasting Center Report of March 2000 is yet another model of how I think a new Jamesian psychology might tend, since it

shows the interplay between our ideas of well-being and fulfillment and our uses of psychopharmacology. Note that all of these models involve a certain mode of popular, rather than simply specialist, address. This is, I think, not coincidental. As Reed points out, James would have "denied his paternity of anything resembling modern experimental psychology" (1997, 201), with its narrowly focused professionalism and its abjuration of issues that relate to lived personal experience. The authors mentioned above have bucked this trend, bringing experimental and clinical psychology into the public realm, a project that James would no doubt have enthusiastically endorsed.

James's criticism of Clifford was not only an attack on Clifford's epistemological assumptions; it was, as I said at the end of the first section, also an attack on scientism of the sort that James saw as pernicious and, ironically, unscientific. James's attack on scientism is just as important in understanding the need for a reconstruction of the sciences as his naturalism is for understanding how to reconstruct philosophy. According to Mary Midgley, the ascendancy of behaviorism at the beginning of the twentieth century resulted in a situation in which the Jamesian model of psychological inquiry that I have been advocating was driven out. This was, says Midgley, partly because of a vacuous notion of what constituted "scientific" inquiry: "Watson and Skinner claimed that, in order to be scientific, psychologists should study people objectively in the sense of viewing them solely as physical objects, that is, by simply ignoring their subjective point of view. This was not just a proposal for a new scientific method. It was a demand for a new and very peculiar moral attitude to human life" (1999, 470). According to James's lights, Clifford's scientism can be said to be the same kind of demand.

Midgley optimistically claims that we have the prospect now of reversing this trend, which has also shown itself to be tenacious in its hold as a mythology of what rigorous thought requires generally. Midgley argues that the demand for a scientific psychology need not manifest itself as a kind of "scientism" that insists on viewing humans as objects, and that it must address itself, if it is to be relevant, to the things that humans find important. Psychology and the social sciences need, then, to include the values and normativity that have been assumed to be the province of (nonscientific) philosophical thought. The really hard work and the work that really matters is the work of keeping all the things we need to believe, as well as all the things that we find important, in play at the same time.

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