

The Reception of WJ in Spain and Unamuno's Reading of Varieties by Jaime Nubiola and Izaskun Martínez

"I am inflamed at the idea of seeing & knowing Spain."
—Henry to William James, 10 July 1877

William James sailed on the steamer *Spain* from New York to Europe on 10 October 1873, but he did not visit Spain or spend time in any other Spanish-speaking country in his life. James had particularly close ties to the philosophical communities in England, Italy, France, and Germany, but his personal links with Spain were much weaker. In those times Spain was not only an isolated and declining country. There was also a war between Spain and the United States in 1898 about Spanish dominance in Cuba and the Philippines. Despite the strong sociological and cultural contrast between the two countries, James's thought and books were soon received in Spain by prominent scholars such as Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), and Eugenio d'Ors (1881-1954). In fact, it is possible to assert that, contrary to the superficial impression, there is a deep affinity between the central questions of American pragmatism and the topics and problems addressed by the most relevant Hispanic thinkers of the twentieth century. Amongst them probably the best and the earliest Spanish reader of James was Miguel de Unamuno, a leading intellectual in the Hispanic cultural world of the past century. Unamuno is most well known for his *Life of Don Quixote and Sancho*.

Our aim in this article, after providing the general framework of the reception of William James in Spain, is to trace the reception of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* through Unamuno's reading of this book.

1. The Reception of William James in Spain

Without any doubt, a sign of the warm reception of William James in Spain is the early translation of a fair number of his books. The first translation of James into Spanish appeared as early as 1900. It was a two-volume translation of *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) by Domingo Barnés (1870-1943), published by the Editorial Jorro of Madrid. A second edition appeared in 1909. Barnés was a well known Spanish educator of his time, member of the famous *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, and expert in psychology and sociology. Besides the *Principles*, Barnés translated a dozen books by contemporary authors such as John Dewey, Henry Bergson, and others.

The second James translation into Spanish was the work *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (1899), which appeared in 1904. The translator was Carlos M. Soldevila. Three years later, the first translation of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* into Spanish was done by Miguel Domenge Mir. It was published in three volumes under the title *Fases del sentimiento religioso. Estudio sobre la naturaleza humana* (Barcelona,

Carbonell y Esteva, 1907-08). This probably had a very small print run, because very few copies remain in Spanish libraries today. Roughly eighty years later, a new translation circulated widely, translated by José Francisco Yvars in 1986, which has been reprinted five times. This edition includes a foreword by the well known Spanish philosopher José Luis L. Aranguren, in which he writes that the year 1901-02 of William James's Gifford Lectures, "was a milestone in the history of psychology, and, therefore, in the history of religious psychology and in the consideration of religion by learned people."¹

The fourth translation of James into Spanish was *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* in 1909, under the title of *La vida eterna y la fe*, reprinted in 1922 as *La voluntad de creer y otros ensayos de filosofía popular*. The translator was Santos Rubiano (1871-1930), an army doctor who was a pioneer in the application of the methods and concepts of modern psychology in the Spanish army. A veteran of the Philippines and North African wars, he was trained as a psychologist at Cornell University in the United States in 1916, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Public Education. In that year Rubiano translated *Psychology: The Briefer Course*, which had a second edition in 1930. After the opening page there is a photographic reproduction of a hand-written text from William James dated 22 March 1908. The text is the following:

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... and am very glad to authorize you as my official translator. Believe me, dear Doctor, with sincere and grateful regards, yours very truly. Wm James²

Rubiano includes a lively "biographical-critical foreword" in his translation of *The Briefer Course*. He writes that this book "does not speak the professor alone, but the genius and the believer," and that James "was able to make from his own personality his own method of teaching, and [that] in his personality it was possible to find not only the philosopher but the good man."³ Besides these two works, Rubiano translated *Pragmatism* into Spanish in 1923, and in 1924 *The Meaning of Truth* as well as a new translation of *Talks to Teachers*.

In the 1930s the interest in James seems to have faded in the Hispanic world. Nevertheless, publishers in Argentina and Mexico in the following two decades produced reprints of old translations as well as some new translations. Among them are the translation of *Some Problems of Philosophy* by Juan Adolfo Vázquez in Tucumán, Argentina, in 1944, and a new translation of *Pragmatism* by Vicente P. Quintero in 1945, which includes a preliminary note by Jorge Luis Borges. In that text Borges described James as an "admirable writer" to the point that he was able to make attractive

1. J. L. L. Aranguren. "Prólogo," in William James. *Las variedades de la experiencia religiosa*. Barcelona, Ediciones Península, 1986, p. 5.

2. W. James. *Compendio de psicología*. Translation of Santos Rubiano. Madrid, Editorial Daniel Jorro, 1916, 2nd edition, 1930.

3. S. Rubiano. "William James. Bosquejo biográfico. Nota crítica sobre su ideario psicológico," p. xiii in *Compendio de psicología*.

such a reasonable way of thinking as the pragmatism of the first two decades of our century, with "halfway solutions" and "quiet hypotheses."⁴ Years later, for unknown reasons, Borges refused to include that foreword in his compilation of prefaces. In this same period in Spain, Luis Rodríguez Aranda translated *Pragmatism* in 1954 and *The Meaning of Truth* in 1957.

With the revival of pragmatism in the last decade there has been a new impulse to translate James into Spanish. In 1992 two manuscripts by James on substance and phenomenon that appeared originally in Ralph Barton Perry's *The Thought and Character of William James* were translated,⁵ and in 1998, on the occasion of the centennial of *Human Immortality*, a translation of this work by Angel Cagigas was published (Jaén, Editorial del Lunar). The most recent James publication in Spain has been a new translation of *Pragmatism* by Ramón del Castillo in the year 2000, including a foreword and editorial notes.⁶ As a summary of this enumeration we can say that over this century most of William James's books have been translated into Spanish. Only *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909) and *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912) are still awaiting a Spanish translator.

Turning now to the secondary bibliography on William James available in Spanish, we may arrange it in two groups. First are the books and papers in Spanish written by Hispanic authors. Second are the translation into Spanish of books and papers from foreign authors. A thorough study is still required, but we can say in advance that probably the second group is bigger than the first. This fact may be interpreted as a sign of the relatively low interest in James in the Spanish speaking countries and at the same time as a sign of the lack of real scholarship and of original production on American pragmatism.

Among the early translations of secondary bibliography, we mention Emile Boutroux's *William James* (A. Colin, Paris, 1911), which was reviewed by Eugenio d'Ors in the journal *Arxius de l'Institut de Ciències* (I/1, 1911, pp. 150-153); this was translated in 1921 into Spanish in Montevideo and published with a foreword by d'Ors (Editorial Claudio García, 1921). A paper by Emile Boutroux on William James's pedagogical ideas was published in the *Boletín de la Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (n. 617, 1911, pp. 222-231). Other later relevant translations are Ralph Barton Perry's *The Thought and Character of William James* (briefer version) by Eduardo Prieto in 1973⁷ and Jacques Barzun's *A Stroll with William James* in 1986, in which the affinity

between William James and the Spanish thinkers Unamuno and Ortega, "both fighting positivism," are mentioned.⁸

Coming now to the original production on James in Spanish speaking countries, in 1961 Pelayo H. Fernández studied in detail how Miguel de Unamuno read William James, his frequent quotations of James, and his marginal notes in the works by James in his library. Fernández's conclusion was that Unamuno's pragmatism was "original with respect to that of the American, from whom he absorbed only complementary features." However, in our opinion, the abundance of facts that Pelayo Fernández lists bears witness to a great influence and a great similarity between the two thinkers on many issues and problems. In any case, Fernández's doctoral dissertation and the subsequent monograph is the starting point—and it has been for us—for everybody interested in the reception of James in Spain, especially through Unamuno.⁹

In the case of José Ortega y Gasset, John Graham published a careful study in which, after noting Ortega's hostility to American pragmatism, he reveals "many basic connections, similarities and points of identity, so that concrete influence and dependence seem more plausible than 'coincidence' between Ortega and James."¹⁰ Graham gives evidence that Ortega read James early in his career, and that Ortega was aware of James's radical empiricism as having anticipated the central notion central in his own "ratio-vitalism." His evidence for James's influences on Ortega through German sources themselves influenced by James is especially convincing.¹¹

In contrast to Ortega, Eugenio d'Ors, whom we mention above, is perhaps the Hispanic philosopher most conscious of his personal connection with American pragmatism. By 1907 he had defined himself as a pragmatist, driven by the same desires as moved his American counterparts, whom he hoped to outstrip by recognizing an aesthetic dimension of human action that could not be reduced to the merely utilitarian.¹² Forty years later, in 1947, in his *El secreto de la filosofía*, which crowned his philosophical career, he generously acknowledged what he owed to the American tradition.

In Latin America the connection with American pragmatism can be traced back to the hostile reactions of the philosophers Coriolano Alberini (1886-1960) from Argentina and Carlos Vaz Ferreira (1871-1958) from Uruguay against the pragmatism of William James and F. C. S. Schiller. The latter disagreed because of the spiritualism of these pragmatists, the former on the grounds of pragmatism being a threat to the traditional Catholic religious background. The

4. J.L. Borges. "Nota preliminar," in W. James, *Pragmatismo. Un nombre nuevo para algunos viejos modos de pensar*. Buenos Aires, Emecé Editores, 1945, p. 10.

5. R.B. Perry. *The Thought and Character of William James*, Volume One, Little, Brown, Boston, 1935, pp. 525-528 and pp. 578-580. Translation of Sebastián M. Pascual Sastre in "Manuscritos sobre la sustancia y el fenómeno," *Taula*, 17-18 (1992), pp. 101-109.

6. W. James. *Pragmatismo. Un nuevo nombre para viejas formas de pensar*. Traducción, notas y prólogo de Ramón del Castillo. Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2000.

7. R. B. Perry. *El pensamiento y la personalidad de William James*. Translation of Eduardo J. Prieto. Buenos Aires, Editorial Paidós, 1973.

8. J. Barzun. *Un paseo con William James*. Translation of Juan José Utrilla. México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986, p. 228.

9. P. H. Fernández. *Miguel de Unamuno y William James. Un paralelo pragmático*. Salamanca, CIADA, 1961.

10. J. T. Graham. *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Life in Ortega y Gasset*. Columbia, MI, University of Missouri Press, 1994, p. 145.

11. A. Donoso. "Review of Graham's A Pragmatist Philosophy of Life in Ortega y Gasset", *Hispania* 78 (1995), p. 499.

12. E. d'Ors. *Glosari de Xenius*. Barcelona, Tallers Gràfics Montserrat, 1915, vol. II, pp. 373-375; and *El secreto de la filosofía*. Barcelona, Iberia, 1947, p. 12.

contrast between both readings has made an open reception of William James difficult, particularly his *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

2. Unamuno's Reading of The Varieties of Religious Experience

Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo was born in the Basque city of Bilbao in 1864. He studied Philosophy and Arts in Madrid, and stayed almost all his life in Salamanca, where he held a chair in Greek Philology. For two periods (1901-14 and 1930-36) he was the rector of the University of Salamanca. Unamuno was a philosopher-poet of great learning, "who sought to save Spain with rationalized religiousness."¹³ He was deeply religious, but far from Catholic orthodoxy, as he had lost his faith in his youth. All his works were characterized by a strong philosophical struggle to reconcile reason with religion. After his son's death in 1897, Unamuno sought to reconquer his childhood faith, oscillating between retreating to orthodox Catholicism, converting to liberal Protestantism, or yielding to scepticism. As Orringer writes, "obsessed with mortality, Unamuno achieved philosophical maturity with a blend of liberal Protestant theology and the philosophies of James and Kierkegaard in his conception of 'the tragic sense of life'— the theme of his essays, novels, dramas, poetry and journalism."¹⁴

Unamuno is one of the most representative writers of the group known as the "Generación del 98" (from the year of Spain's defeat in the war with the United States over Cuba and the Philippines), a group deeply concerned with the future of Spain in the contemporary world. Unamuno's option was to "españolizar Europa" ["to hispanicize Europe"] in order to overcome the isolation of Spain. Unamuno's main philosophical works are *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* [Life of Don Quixote and Sancho] (1905), *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos* [The Tragic Sense of Life] (1911-12), and *La agonía del Cristianismo* [The Agony of Christianity] (1931). He died of a stroke in Salamanca on the last day of 1936.

As we have said, Unamuno had a great wealth of learning, and he also had a very well-stocked library of literature, philosophy and humanities in all languages, preserved now in the Casa-Museo Miguel de Unamuno in the University of Salamanca. That library contained over 100 volumes of prose, poetry and fiction by Americans, ranging from such nineteenth-century classics authors as Emerson and Thoreau to contemporary authors such as Pound and Wharton.¹⁵ Relevant for our present research are three works by William James that are kept in that library: *The Will to Believe* (1897), *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), and *Pragmatism* (1907). The copy of the *Varieties* corresponds to the first edition; there are hand-written pencil annotations by Unamuno in the margins of 32 pages of that

volume.

In Unamuno's works, over a span of forty years, there are 32 quotations from William James: 19 from *The Will to Believe*, 7 from *The Principles of Psychology*, 5 from *Varieties* and 2 from *Pragmatism*. His first quotation of the *Varieties*, a translation of Mrs. Annie Besant's quotation in page 27 of *Varieties*, corresponds to the year 1904; his last quotation in 1913 in his *The Tragic Sense of Life* is a remembrance of God as producer of immortality for the great majority of men, Kant, James, and Unamuno himself included.¹⁶ In Unamuno's copy the conclusion James draws in the *Varieties* is marked with six vertical lines and one horizontal: "Religion, in fact, for the great majority of our own race means immortality, and nothing else. God is the producer of immortality."¹⁷

The exploration of Unamuno's library and of his texts reveals himself as an avid reader of James. Unamuno feels himself congenial with James, whom he likes to describe as "the pragmatist, another hopeless Christian", and as "such a serious man, of so sincere spirit and so deeply religious."¹⁸ As we said before, Fernández's conclusion was that Unamuno's pragmatism was "original with respect to that of the American, from whom he absorbed only complementary features." However, in our opinion, it would be more accurate to say that there is not only a great similarity between the two thinkers on many issues and problems, but that James had a permanent impact on Unamuno's intellectual development. Very recently, Pedro Cerezo has studied more precisely the real scope of James's influence. According to Cerezo, for Unamuno the reading of William James in the first decade of the century was a turning point in the evolution of his mind, taking Unamuno away from metaphysical pessimism and turning his attention both to practical reason as well as to action that is able to give better orientation and a stronger sense to life.¹⁹

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¹³ N. A. Orringer. "Unamuno y Jugo, Miguel de (1864-1936)," in E. Craig (ed.). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London, Routledge, 1998, vol. 9, p. 519.

¹⁴ N. A. Orringer. "Unamuno y Jugo, Miguel de (1864-1936)," p. 519.

¹⁵ Cf. M. Thomas Inge. "Unamuno's Correspondence with North Americans: A Checklist." *Hispania* 53 (1970), p. 277. For a catalogue of that library, see M. J. Valdés and M. Elena. *An Unamuno Source Book: A Catalogue of Readings and Acquisitions with an Introductory Essay on Unamuno's Dialectical Enquiry*, Toronto, U of Toronto P, 1973.

¹⁶ Cf. M. Unamuno. *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*. Madrid, Renacimiento, 1911-12, pp. 10-11.

¹⁷ W. James. *The Varieties of Religious Experience. The Works of William James*, vol. XIII Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1985, p. 412.

¹⁸ M. de Unamuno. *Ensayos*, Bernardo G. de Cándamo, ed., Madrid, Aguilar, 1951, 3ª ed., vol I, p. 978 and p. 809.

¹⁹ Pedro Cerezo. *Las máscaras de lo trágico. Filosofía y tragedia en Miguel de Unamuno*. Madrid, Trotta, 1996, pp. 278-289.