

WILLIAM JAMES AND THE METAPHILOSOPHY OF INDIVIDUALISM

DAVID RONDEL

Abstract: This paper argues that an individualist perspective is a crucial element of William James's metaphilosophical outlook. In broad outline, the individualist argument the paper attributes to James can be characterized like this. Disputes among philosophers about the optimal point of view from which to consider this or that philosophical problem are themselves only adequately adjudicated from an individualist perspective. That is, when it comes to an assortment of important philosophical questions (not all of them perhaps, but a significant number), an individualist perspective should replace a more objective one, and whether it should or not is itself a question that should be decided from an individualist perspective.

Keywords: individualism, William James, metaphilosophy, pluralism, pragmatism.

If we take the whole history of philosophy, the systems reduce themselves to a few main types which, under all the technical verbiage in which the ingenious intellect of man envelopes them, are just so many visions, modes of feeling the whole push, and seeing the whole drift of life, forced on one by one's total character and experience, and on the whole *preferred*—there is no other truthful word—as one's best working attitude.

—William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (WWJ 7:14–15)

William James once described himself as a “rabid individualist,” and it is admittedly difficult to disagree (James 2001, 625).¹ A strong “individualist” current runs through virtually every aspect of James's thought. From his “introspective” psychology to his sense of what makes a human life significant, from his ruminations on the freedom of the will to his opposition of U.S. imperial meddling in the Philippines, the emphasis on the fundamental importance of the individual—“the person in the singular number” as he put it (WWJ 17:97)—is always clearly in view.

¹ Citations to William James's published writings are keyed to the nineteen-volume *Works of William James* (Harvard University Press, 1975–1988). Parenthetical citations follow one common formula, according to which (WWJ 1:44) denotes page 44 of volume 1 of *The Works of William James*.

That individuality is an important theme in James's work is beyond dispute.² Ralph Barton Perry notes that, for James, "[i]ndividualism is fundamental" (1935, 1:265). James Pawelski says that "individualism is one of the most basic and persistent themes in James's thought" (2007, xiv). John J. McDermott characterizes James as "an unabashed and indefatigable champion of sheer individuality" (1986, 44). One can find similar statements from virtually every commentator on James. Stephen Bush should be taken literally when he says that "no one doubts" the centrality of individuality in James's corpus (2017, 2). And yet, while considerable attention has been devoted to the individualistic elements in James's psychological, ethical, metaphysical, political, and religious thinking, the extent to which Jamesian individualism might bear on metaphilosophical questions—on questions concerning what philosophy is, what it is good for, and how it is most profitably carried out—has gone for the most part unexplored.

In what follows I argue that an individualist perspective is a crucial element of James's metaphilosophical outlook. This is significant not only because it sheds new light on a pervasive theme in James's thinking but also because James's metaphilosophical vision has often been described (not incorrectly) in overtly "pluralist" rather than "individualist" terms. I do not dispute that James depicts pragmatism as (among other things) an open, capacious, and pluralistic doctrine concerning what philosophy is and what it may yet become. But I also want to suggest that the metaphilosophical pluralism that he commends in pragmatism is not incompatible with, or even an alternative to, the metaphilosophical individualism that is my subject here. On the contrary, I argue that, in James's case at least, these are more or less different sides of the same fundamental attitude. Or, more precisely, that James's metaphilosophical outlook is pluralist only because it is individualist, and conversely. That is, respect for individualism leads James to pluralism. Acceptance of pluralism in turn requires giving individualism its due.

In broad outline, the individualist metaphilosophical argument I attribute to James can be characterized like this. Disputes among philosophers about the optimal point of view from which to consider this or that philosophical problem are themselves only adequately adjudicated from an individualist perspective. That is, when it comes to an assortment of important philosophical questions (not all of them perhaps, but a significant number), an individualist perspective should replace a more objective one, and whether it should or not is itself a question that should be decided

² Some important contributions to the literature on Jamesian individualism include Albrecht 2012, Bush 2017, Gale 1999, Koopman 2005, Marchetti 2015, and Taylor 2003. I address some of these issues in Rondel 2017 and 2018. Pawelski 2007 is probably the most extensive book-length treatment of James's individualism.

from an individualist perspective.³ This argument is summed up by Gerald Myers, who correctly says on James's behalf, "It is the philosopher's job, after weighing arguments and keeping moral and logical considerations in mind, to recognize the limits of philosophical reflection and debate and to appreciate when a decision rather than a line of reasoning is called for" (1986, 206). The core of James's metaphilosophical individualism is the idea that, in many cases, navigating our way through the deepest philosophical divisions comes down to a decision—James himself used the word "preference"—and that what he calls an individual's "best working attitude" may and ought to have the last word (WWJ 7:14–15).

Points of View in Philosophy

James believed that a good number of philosophical disputes are, at bottom, disagreements about the optimal point of view from which to address some issue or question. "To the very last, there are various 'points of view' which the philosopher must distinguish in discussing the world," he wrote. "And what is inwardly clear from one point remains a bare externality and datum to the other" (WWJ 6:6). Just think about how much philosophical skirmishing—among professionals and amateurs alike, in virtually every area of philosophy—boils down to disagreement about the purported superiority of one point of view and the purported inferiority of another. One philosopher offers a rich phenomenological description; another rejoins that such descriptions are ontologically inert, indicating merely how things appear, not how they really are. One philosopher assures us that valuable projects and relationships really can render a human life significant. Another one responds that, from the point of view of the universe, our lives are trivial specks—no more important in the order of things than the lives of oysters.⁴ Some philosophers believe that free will is illusory, since its existence is incompatible, they say, with a deterministic material universe. Others reply that free will is no illusion, since, from the point of view of everyday human experience, we simply cannot dispense with the conviction (try though we might) that we are agents for whom there are

³ A quick note about phrases like "objective perspective" and "objective point of view." In using them, I am not alluding to something like Hilary Putnam's "God's-Eye View" or to what Thomas Nagel memorably dubbed "the View from Nowhere." I am thinking simply about the fact that human beings can adopt different points of view in their thinking, and that some of these are more objective than others.

⁴ I allude here to David Hume's memorable claim, from the posthumously published essay "Of Suicide": "The life of a man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster" (1998, 319). Assuming a different point of view, Bernard Williams responds: "No one should make any claims about the importance of human beings to the universe: the point is about the importance of human beings to human beings." After all, "[t]o see the world from a human point of view is not an absurd thing for human beings to do" (1985, 118).

genuine choices. Some philosophers think it best to classify bits of the world from the point of view of explanatory convenience and predictive power. Others think we should strive for a more objective view—to locate “where the natural joints are,” as Socrates famously put it in the *Phaedrus* (265e). (Still others say that nature has no “joints” that might or might not be located.)

What looks philosophically plausible and correct from one point of view can look farfetched and implausible from another. This deceptively simple insight was at the very core of James’s outlook. Thinking about a problem in a new or different way has the power to conceal deep impasses and tensions that, from the point of view of another way of thinking about a problem, looked intractable.⁵ This is one upshot of the anecdote, recounted by James at the beginning of his second *Pragmatism* lecture, about a “ferocious metaphysical dispute” provoked by a squirrel running around a tree.

Some years ago, being with a camping party in the mountains, I returned from a solitary ramble to find every one engaged in a ferocious metaphysical dispute. The *corpus* of the dispute was a squirrel—a live squirrel supposed to be clinging to one side of a tree trunk; while over against the tree’s opposite side a human being was imagined to stand. This human witness tries to get sight of the squirrel by moving rapidly round the tree, but no matter how fast he goes, the squirrel moves as fast in the opposite direction, and always keeps the tree between himself and the man, so that never a glimpse of him is caught. The resultant metaphysical problem now is this: *Does the man go round the squirrel or not?* (WWJ 1:27)

James’s resolution (which a few of his camping companions dismiss as a “shuffling evasion”) involves vacillating from one point of view to another, from one meaning of “to go round” to a different one.

If you mean passing from the north of him to the east, then to the south, then to the west, and then to the north of him again, obviously the man does go round him, for he occupies these successive positions. But if on the contrary you mean being first in front of him, then on the right of him, then behind him, then on his left, and finally in front again, it is quite as obvious that the man fails to go round him, for by the compensating movements the squirrel makes, he keeps his belly turned towards the man all the time, and his back turned away. (WWJ 1:27–28)

⁵ As James wrote in *The Principles of Psychology* (from 1890), “Any question can be made immaterial by subsuming all its answers under a common head.” (Recall the story about the shah of Persia refusing to be taken to Derby Day, saying “It is already known to me that one horse can run faster than another.” As James brilliantly points out, the shah made the question “Which horse?” immaterial [WWJ 9:1267].)

Looked at one way, it appears that the man goes around the squirrel. Looked at another way, it appears that he does not.

The case of a “drunkard under temptation” provides yet another example of the philosophical significance of different points of view for James. “He [the drunkard] has made a resolve to reform, but he is now solicited again by the bottle.”

His moral triumph or failure literally consists in his finding the right *name* for the case. If he says that it is a case of not wasting good liquor already poured out, or a case of not being churlish and unsociable when in the midst of friends, or a case of learning something at last about a brand of whiskey which he never met before, or a case of celebrating a public holiday, or a case of stimulating himself to a more energetic resolve in favor of abstinence than any he has ever yet made, then he is lost. His choice of the wrong name seals his doom. But if, in spite of all the plausible good names with which his thirsty fancy so copiously furnishes him, he unwaveringly clings to the truer bad name, and apperceives the case as that of “being a drunkard” . . . his feet are planted on the road to salvation. He saves himself by thinking rightly. (WWJ 12:110)

A large part of intellectual skill for James involves the capacity to oscillate from one point of view to another, to move between more personal and more objective ways of considering the world. James would have almost certainly enjoyed the following passage from Thomas Nagel (albeit in disagreement with the main sentiment), in which the capacity to travel in thought from one point of view to another is singled out as a prerequisite for philosophical reflection, the kind of capacity without which it would be impossible to engage in the practice of philosophy as we know it. Here is Nagel:

Most of our experience of the world, and most of our desires, belong to our individual points of view: We see things *from here*, so to speak. But we are also able to think about the world in abstraction from our particular position in it—in abstraction from who we are. . . . Each of us begins with a set of concerns, desires, and interests of his own, and each of us can recognize that the same is true of others. We can then remove ourselves in thought from our particular position in the world and think simply of all those people, without singling out as *I* the one we happen to be. By performing this deed of abstraction we occupy what I shall call the impersonal standpoint. . . . A great deal emerges from our capacity to view the world in this way, including the great enterprise of trying to discover the objective nature of reality. (1991, 10–11)

How shall we decide from what point of view this or that philosophical problem is best approached? How shall we decide whether our lives can be significant, or if God exists, or whether we possess a free will? From what vantage point are such questions best reflected on and, perhaps, settled? And more, how shall we navigate second-order disagreements about the

optimal vantage point from which to reflect on and settle these questions? My argument is that, for James, such questions are best approached from an individualist rather than a more objective point of view, and that subsequent disputes about whether an individualist or objective view is superior can *themselves* only be settled from an individualist point of view. Hence the metaphilosophical fundamentality of individualism for James.

The most obvious example of the view I have in mind can be found in James's argument about the rationality of religious belief in "The Will to Believe" (1896). But I want to focus on two other prominent (and interestingly connected) areas of James's corpus to bring the nature of this metaphilosophical individualism into sharper focus: his argument for the existence of "chance" and some of his thoughts on what might render a human life significant.⁶ Let me take a few moments to sketch James's individualist approach to these issues and to respond on his behalf to some criticisms.

James's Individualist Metaphilosophy

In "The Dilemma of Determinism" (1884) James attempted to convince his audience at the Harvard Divinity School that there is real "chance" in the world, that the future may have at least some "ambiguous possibilities hidden in its womb" (WWJ 6:81). Readers of this essay often encounter difficulty locating the arguments for its conclusion. For James's claim that we inhabit a universe in which there is real "chance" does not issue from the more objective point of view of metaphysics or the natural sciences. Instead, James challenges the "ironclad determinists" by appealing to the point of view of ordinary lived experience, to the unshakable feeling we all have according to which there are and will be "indeterminate future volitions" (WWJ 6:85). This is part of what he said to his listeners at Harvard:

What is meant by saying that my choice of which way to walk home after the lecture is ambiguous and matter of chance as far as the present moment is concerned? It means that both Divinity Avenue and Oxford Street are called; but that only one . . . shall be chosen. Now, I ask you seriously to suppose that this ambiguity of my choice is real; and then to make the impossible hypothesis that the choice is made twice over, and each time falls on a different street. In other words, imagine that I first walk through Divinity Avenue, and then imagine that the powers governing the universe annihilate ten minutes of time with all that it contained, and set me back at the door of this hall just as I was before

⁶ There is an intimate relationship in James's thought between freedom and the conditions under which a human life can be said to be "significant." Since, on James's view, significant lives require the "marriage" of some "unhabitual ideal" and the "pluck and will" to bring it about, free will (both in the free adopting of ideals and in the freely undertaken strenuous effort to enact them) is a necessary condition of significant lives (WWJ 12:165). Bluntly, a world without free will would also be a world without any significant lives.

the choice was made. Imagine then that, everything else being the same, I now make a different choice and traverse Oxford Street. You, as passive spectators, look on and see the two alternative universes—one of them with me walking through Divinity Avenue in it, the other with the same me walking through Oxford Street. Now, if you are determinists you believe one of these universes to have been from eternity impossible: you believe it to have been impossible because of the intrinsic irrationality or accidentality somewhere involved in it. But looking outwardly at these universes, can you say which is the impossible and accidental one, and which the rational and necessary one? I doubt if the most ironclad determinist among you could have the slightest glimmer of light on this point. (WWJ 6:84)

This is not so much an argument (in the conventional philosophical sense of the term) as it is a rhetorical appeal to the “free will theory of popular sense” that we carry with us anyway. Needless to say, this kind of appeal will leave the ironclad determinists unmoved. For it is no refutation of determinism, they will say, merely to point out that, from the perspective of lived human experience, *it feels as though* there are genuinely free volitions. The rejoinder to this objection is that the quarrel between determinism and indeterminism is, as James himself says, “altogether metaphysical”—beyond our intellectual capacities to settle in some non-question-begging way. We thus pass this issue over to what James in “The Will to Believe” memorably called our “passional nature” and make a decision—a *personal choice*—one way or the other (WWJ 6:8).⁷

A similar deference to the individual point of view can be found in the 1899 essay “What Makes a Life Significant?” There James argues that judgments about the significance of a life can be decisively rendered only by the person whose life it is. “Wherever a process of life communicates an eagerness to him who lives it, there the life becomes genuinely significant” (WWJ 12:134). James urges us not to forget that even those whom we find “grotesque” or “repulsive” are “animated by an inner joy of living as hot or hotter than that which . . . [we] feel beating in . . . [our] private breast” (WWJ 11:99). As Perry helpfully puts the point, “James . . . proclaimed the supreme value of those feelings and strivings which are unique in each individual, and whose authentic quality is immediately revealed to him alone” (1935, 1:266). The view is not quite that a life is significant merely if an individual believes or says it is. Rather, James is affirming something like

⁷ As is well known, the problem of free will was no merely intellectual puzzle for James. On the contrary, he felt the emotional weight of the issue in a deep and visceral way. In his diary entry of April 30, 1870, he wrote, “I think that yesterday was a crisis in my life. I finished the first part of Renouvier’s second *Essais* and see no reason why his definition of free will—‘the sustaining of a thought *because I choose to* when I might have other thoughts’—need be the definition of an illusion. At any rate, I will assume for the present—until next year—that it is no illusion. My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will” (James 1926, 1:147).

an incorrigibility principle here, according to which (roughly): first-person claims about the significance of a life, while not infallible, are afforded a certain epistemic priority and thus for practical purposes cannot be overridden. As a result, James cautions us against making pronouncements about the significance or insignificance of other people's lives. "The inner significance of other lives exceeds all our power of sympathy and insight," he reminds us (WWJ 11:101). "In every being that is real there is something external to, and sacred from, the grasp of every other" (WWJ 6:111). As with so much else for James, an individualistic perspective carries the day here. Each individual life is incommensurably singular in what makes it significant. And more, questions about the significance of a particular life must ultimately be answered from the inside—subjectively—by the individual person who inhabits it.

Just as individuals shall have the final say about what makes their life significant, so too shall they have the last word about whether the world has some "ambiguous possibilities hidden in its womb" (WWJ 6:81). Philosophical perspective ultimately boils down a personal choice. There is nothing *intrinsically* superior about a more objective point of view, which of course is not to deny that some points of view are better than others for the achievement of certain kinds of ends.

Many philosophers think that the superiority of an objective or scientific point of view is self-evident, a basic precondition for the prospect that human beings might engage in an activity called "inquiry." After all, they say, philosophy is in the business of finding out truths. Other points of view—and other discourses—may well have their practical advantages in this or that context. But insofar as we wish to discover literal truths on some subject, to describe things as they really are, the less objective points of view must accede to the more objective ones. In a review of John McDowell's *Mind and World*, Jerry Fodor expressed the point this way:

[T]he world picture that the natural sciences lay out has a sort of priority—sometimes viewed as metaphysical, sometimes as methodological, sometimes as ideological, sometimes as all of these at once—to which other discourse is required to defer insofar as it purports to speak literal truths. Conflicts between the scientific image and, for example, the claims that moral theories make, or theories of agency, or theories of mind, are real possibilities. If they arise, it's the other views that must give way; not because the "scientific method" is infallible but because the natural realm is all the realms there are or can be. All that ever happens, our being rational included, is the conformity of natural things to natural laws. Correspondingly, the problems about mind and world have to be situated within the general scientific enterprise. (Fodor 1995)

For his part, James believed that it was a deeply misguided assumption—widespread among philosophers and across the sciences—that a maximally objective point of view is always and everywhere superior to an individualist

one. He might have responded to Fodor like this: “Individuality is founded in feeling; and the recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character, are the only places in the world in which we catch real fact in the making, and directly perceive how events happen” (WWJ 15:395).

The only form of thing that we directly encounter . . . is our own personal life. The only complete category of our thinking . . . is that category of personality, every other category being one of the abstract elements of that. *And this systematic denial on Science’s part of personality as a condition of events, this rigorous belief that in its own essential and innermost nature our world is a strictly impersonal world, may . . . be the very defect that our descendants will be most surprised at in our own boasted Science.* (WWJ 6:241; emphasis added)⁸

But now a further cluster of questions rears its head. How can the metaphilosophical dispute between Fodor and James be resolved? To what point of view can we retreat in order to settle it? If you, like Fodor, are convinced that a more objective view is obviously preferable to a more individualist one, ask yourself this question: From what point of view is *that* conclusion affirmed? Can the superiority of a scientific point of view be established scientifically, as self-evident from within that very same scientific point of view? When Fodor says that other theories and discourses must “give way” to the “scientific image,” from what point of view can we assess the merits or demerits of that Fodorian imperative?

As we have seen, James thinks that this kind of second-order question must be turned over to an individualist point of view. “Introspective Observation is what we have to rely on first and foremost and always” (WWJ 8:185). The quest for a more objective point of view is not self-justifying. It is not, to use a beautiful phrase from the poet Wordsworth, “a truth which is its own testimony” (1992, 752). There are occasions in the course of our philosophical thinking when reason and argument come to an end, when a decision rather than an argument may and ought to have the last word. Many philosophers will be turned off by James’s individualist view, no doubt. And yet, ironically, that kind of reaction would offer a demonstration of its soundness. For isn’t “being turned off” by a philosophical outlook (whatever that comes to exactly) ultimately the type of conclusion that arises from an individualist point of view? Is it not, at bottom, a response of the passionate nature? A mode of “feeling the whole push, and seeing the whole drift of life, forced on one by one’s

⁸ A common criticism is that James’s notion of experience is too broad and undifferentiated. Cheryl Misak criticizes James for thinking that “mystical and drug-induced experiences are as good for speaking to claims about the world as are the experiences delivered by our senses.” What James fails to provide, she thinks, is “some basis for dividing experiences into those that are relevant for truth claims and those that are not” (2013, 69–70).

total character and experience, and on the whole *preferred* . . . as one's best working attitude" (WWJ 7:14–15)?

James is admittedly unclear about precisely when in the course of philosophical reflection an individualist view may be responsibly adopted.⁹ He is also vague about the specific issues and questions for which an individualist point of view is appropriate and those for which it is not. Richard Gale points out that James lets an individualist point of view have the final say when he is thinking about "humanistically valuable concepts, such as the self and its free will" (1999, 222). It is less clear how James thinks humanistically worthless concepts (whatever, if anything, those might be) are best handled.

We receive some (limited) guidance on these questions in "The Will to Believe" essay, where James claims that it is only intellectually appropriate to turn some issue over to the "passional nature" when it is a "genuine option"—when it is "forced," "live," and "momentous." Yet James also saw that different people will understand the satisfaction of these criteria in markedly different ways. Crudely, the kind of hypothesis that is "live" for one person may well be "dead" for another. The upshot is that the question about when an individualist perspective is appropriate is itself determined, to an extent and in an important number of cases at least, from within an individualist perspective.

Ultimately, I think that James would have been hesitant to put forward any firm rules or principles here. As he put the general point in the *Principles of Psychology*,

Life is one long struggle between conclusions based on abstract ways of conceiving cases, and opposite conclusions prompted by our instinctive perception of them as individual facts. The logical stickler for justice always seems pedantic and mechanical to the man who goes by tact and the particular instance, and who usually makes a poor show at argument. Sometimes the abstract conceiver's way is better, sometimes that of the man of instinct. But . . . here we can give no general rule for deciding when it is morally useful to treat a concrete case as *sui generis*, and when to lump it with others in an abstract class. (WWJ 9:1266–67)

High levels of abstraction, James says in a corresponding footnote, "shows the world in a clear frosty light from which all fuliginous mists of affection, all the swamp-lights of sentimentality, are absent." On the other hand, "The illogical refusal to treat certain concretes by the mere law of their genus has made the drama of human history. The obstinate insisting

⁹ Alexis Dianda recently argued that James does not accept a "sharp dualism between the passional and the rational" (2018, 651). This suggests that the adoption of an individualist point of view for James does not occur merely when the reasons run out. Nor that the adoption of such a view should be understood as a wholly or necessarily antirational event.

that tweedledum is *not* tweedledee is the bone and marrow of life” (WWJ 9:1267). Apodictic certainty is not in the cards. We have no choice but to muddle along, keep an open mind, and make peace with the fact that there is no clear method or compass to which we can appeal.

Pragmatism, Pluralism, and Individualism

For pragmatists like James, the question about the best sort of description of X—the best point of view from which to think about it— is always bound up with our reason for wanting to describe X in the first place, bound up with the particular problem from which our need to deal or cope with X first arose. That is why it is pointless to ask, absent some context, problem, or project, “Is the carpenter’s or the particle physicist’s account of tables the true one?” (Rorty 1999, 153). On a pragmatist way of thinking, different descriptions and points of view are like different tools, each superior for the accomplishment of certain ends.¹⁰ James puts the point crisply in “The Sentiment of Rationality” (from 1896):

Every way of classifying a thing is but a way of handling it for some particular purpose. Conceptions, “kinds,” are teleological instruments. No abstract concept can be a valid substitute for a concrete reality except with reference to a particular interest in the conceiver. The interest of theoretic rationality . . . is but one of a thousand human purposes. When others rear their heads, it must pack up its little bundle and retire until its turn recurs. (WWJ 6:62)

Pragmatists—both classical and “neo”—agree that there is no context or project-independent way of dealing with X. There is no way to strip away all human interests and see X as a disinterested, omniscient, deity might see it. Such an omniscient perspective may strike us as a laudable goal, but it is impossible to achieve. There is no chance that we might set our bodies, evolution, history, culture, language, and environment to one side and consider things as they are by themselves (Allen 2004, 108).

This pragmatist view seems to suggest a kind of metaphilosophical pluralism. Philosophy, like all human endeavors, is in the business of meeting human needs. But given the spectacular variety of human needs, philosophy can and should be many things at once. This is one way to gloss the metaphilosophical upshot of Giovanni Papini’s “corridor” metaphor, memorably deployed by James in *Pragmatism*, according to which pragmatism

¹⁰ As Richard Rorty wrote in a reply to Hilary Putnam, “Noting that the same thing can usefully be described in lots of different ways is the beginning of philosophical sophistication. Insisting that one of these ways has some privilege other than occasional utility is the beginning of metaphysics” (2000, 88).

lies in the midst of our theories, like a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable chambers open out of it. In one you may find a man writing an atheistic volume; in the next someone on his knees praying for faith and strength; in a third a chemist investigating a body's properties. In a fourth a system of idealistic metaphysics is being excogitated; in a fifth the impossibility of metaphysics is being shown. But they all own the corridor, and all must pass through it if they want a practicable way of getting into or out of their respective rooms. (WWJ 1:32)

Pragmatism, James contends, is “completely genial.” She is ready to accept insight from wherever it may arise, “willing to take anything . . . to entertain any hypothesis,” and to “consider any evidence” (WWJ 1:44).

She is willing . . . to follow either logic or the senses and to count the humblest and most personal experiences. . . . Her only test of probable truth is what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of experience's demands, nothing being omitted. . . . [Y]ou see already how democratic she is. Her manners are as various and flexible, her resources as rich and endless, and her conclusions as friendly as those of mother nature. (WWJ 1:44)

My argument, in short and to sum up, is that James's metaphilosophical outlook is simultaneously pluralist and individualist—or, better, it is pluralist *only because* it is in the first instance individualist. Philosophy should be open and capacious *only because* it should offer something for everybody. Philosophy should accommodate various temperaments and sensibilities *only because* of the differently inclined individuals who might come to it for edification or inspiration or enjoyment or peace. It should be as “friendly as mother nature” *only because* of the fact that nature contains many varieties of individuals, with many different kinds of desires, goals, and purposes. Philosophy should be pluralistic on James's view, but that is *only because* it should be individualistic.

Department of Philosophy
University of Nevada, Reno
1664N. Virginia Street, MS 0102
Reno, NV 89557
USA
drondel@unr.edu

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