WILLIAM JAMES'S *WILL TO BELIEVE* REVISITED

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By

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to defend William James's will to believe doctrine from the main lines of criticism which have been levelled against it throughout the last century. Principal among such criticisms are accusations that James fideistically advocated an intrusion of the subject into doxastic practice which opens the door to wishful thinking, and that he confused belief and hypothesis-adoption. My defense of James against such charges will be based upon analyses of two important but neglected components of his position--the "liveness" of certain options and propositions, and the "strenuous mood"--and upon a contextualization of the role assigned by James to "passional nature" within the terms of reference of his work on immediate experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Several decades ago, Richard Taylor conjectured that James's *The Will to Believe* was at that time "perhaps the most widely read essay on the rationality of faith ever written in English."[1] To judge from the pervasive presence of James's essay, or sections of it, in so many subsequent anthologies which have addressed this area in the succeeding thirty years, one could safely conclude that Taylor's comments remain true today, on the essay's 100th anniversary.

The Will to Believe has been most commonly taken as arguing for a fideistic suspension of normal canons of doxastic practice in the case of certain beliefs, particularly those of a religious kind. On the face of it, such an assessment seems accurate. At the beginning of his essay, for example, James says that he is proposing a "justification of faith"[2] in the formation of beliefs which involve forced, momentous and live options. Later, he contrasts the class of beliefs involving such faith with

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[1] John Stuart Mill, *Theism*, ed. Richard Taylor (Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), xv.

[2] William James, "The Will to Believe," *Essays in Pragmatism*, ed. Alburey Castell (Hafner Publishing Company, 1948), 88.

another class which, on account of its association with sensory experience and the practicalities of everyday life, is said to allow for indefinite delay pending the development of compelling evidence. In relation to this latter class he commends "the attitude of sceptical balance."[3] His contrasting of these classes, and his advocacy of the involvement of "passional nature" and of volition in belief in the former, has been for many reminiscent of Kierkegaard, and has earned him a reputation, as Morton White put it graphically, as "the patron saint of wishful thinking."[4]

Such a reputation has been reinforced by pragmatism's appeals to the consequences of belief in the determination of truth. One of the consequences of theistic belief, James is widely recognized to have held, is a form of desirable personal edification. James sometimes refers to this state as the "strenuous mood," although commentators have taken little serious account of what is included by James under this heading. Bertrand Russell, for example, among many others, understood James to be contending that theistic belief can be justifiably adopted--can be deemed to

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[3] Ibid., 101.

[4] Morton White, "Pragmatism and the Revolt Against Formalism: Revising Some Doctrines of William James," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 26 (1990), 15. See also Walter Kaufmann, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1961), 114-120; Wallace Matson, *The Existence of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), 206-215.

be true--on the strength solely of its leading to such desirable consequences. Needless to say, charges of wishful thinking have been reinforced by such readings.

Charges of wishful thinking, however, are only part of a larger critical reception of James's essay. Even if it were true that in the intellectual life one is sometimes forced to move ahead of what is justified evidentially, such movement, it has been argued by Russell and others,[5] ought to take the form of hypothesis-adoption or some kind of gamble, not belief. In sum, then, there are two main sets of charges facing James to which I will be responding in this study: wishful thinking, and confusing belief and hypothesis-adoption.

My defense of James against such charges has three main components. First, *The Will to Believe*, I will show, is not concerned about propositions, theistic or otherwise, which are not already believed or towards which there is not already a believing propensity. James's concern was with certain *existing* beliefs or propensities to believe. This pivotal feature of his position has been overlooked for decades because of the pervasive neglect of what he has to say in his essay about the 'liveness' of certain

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[5] Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1961); *Philosophical Essays* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910); James Wernham, *James's Will-to-Believe Doctrine: A Heretical View* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987).

propositions and options. A major component of my study, therefore, will concern the centrality to James's position in *The Will to Believe* of the notion of liveness.

The second major element of my case is related to its emphasis upon liveness. Why should liveness matter? Liveness matters because the abandonment of certain present beliefs or propensities to believe, or the prohibition of a further development of such beliefs or believing propensities, has significant epistemological consequences. In many forms of inquiry, belief, as John J. McDermott has put it, is "a wedge into the tissue of experience, for the purpose of liberating dimensions otherwise closed to the agnostic standpoint."[6] With respect to theism in particular, which is the main concern of *The Will to Believe* and of this study, the belief state uniquely gives rise to certain important effects, including effects upon inquiry itself. It alone occasions what James calls the "strenuous mood," and that state has important intellectual as well as subjective components, as I will show. The abandonment of live theism, therefore, would have major consequences not only of a personal nature but upon intellectual inquiry into the merits of theism as well. An evidentialism such as Clifford's, which would essentially counsel the abandonment of live theism, should be assessed carefully with a view to

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[6] John J. McDermott, *The Writings of William James* (New York: Random House, 1967), xxx.

the loss of the strenuous mood. The second major aspect of my case, then, involves a close inquiry into what exactly is involved in the strenuous mood. The considerations of liveness and the strenuous mood should be taken together, if James's intentions regarding the relation between religious belief and its consequences is to be grasped properly. Defending certain kinds of existing beliefs in a way which takes both their intellectual and personal consequences into account is a very different undertaking than defending the adoption of beliefs solely on the basis of their personally edifying consequences--which is what longstanding prudential readings of James have contended that *The Will to Believe* is doing.

A third and overarching aspect of my case has to do with the context within which the subjective elements of liveness and the strenuous mood stand in James's thought. Lying behind the charges of wishful thinking and confusing belief and hypothesis-adoption has been the widespread custom among commentators of isolating the role assigned by James in *The Will to Believe* to passional nature from the larger setting within which that role actually functions in James's thought as a whole. One of my principal tasks in this study, therefore, will be to contextualize the role of the subject within the terms of reference of the complex unity of immediate experience. The subject and world, on James's account, are simultaneously implicated in the

constitution of experience and belief in such a way that subjective elements do not necessarily possess the scope of influence most often imputed to them by commentators on *The Will to Believe* who charge James with having sponsored wishful thinking.

It is this same partnership of subject and world which moved James to defend belief rather than hypothesis-adoption in *The Will to Believe*, and which precluded him from advancing the prudential argument which is so widely attributed to him. The subjective elements of the strenuous mood are inseparable from the intellectual elements of that mood which occur uniquely in the belief state. The desirable subjective aspects of the strenuous mood cannot be appropriated in a prudentially self-interested way because they follow exclusively upon such intellectual convictions about the world, convictions which, James says explicitly, cannot be acquired at will. Such convictions, moreover, and the personal responses to which they give rise, were held by James to be rooted in a certain commensurateness between subject and world. One of the major elements of James's position in *The Will to Believe* is to challenge the notion that an unwillingness to concede the possibility of such commensurateness is the preeminently safe and responsible position which it is widely purported to be. It is neither safer nor more responsible than giving benefit of the doubt to such commensurateness, James argues, and any consistent

evidentialism will be unable to escape a degree of risk on this matter.

Overall, then, my proposal that liveness and the strenuous mood be taken as major interpretive keys to *The Will to Believe* will involve a broader contextualization of these aspects of James's position within the terms of reference of his account of immediate experience as a whole. Within such terms of reference the longstanding seige of James's essay for having fideistically commended wishful thinking and for having confused belief and hypothesis-adoption are much more difficult to sustain. Contrary to most interpretations of *The Will to Believe*, James never advanced the potentially self-serving prudential argument that it is the personally beneficial consequences alone which flow from theistic belief which justify the creation of a believing theism.[7] Nor did he confuse belief and hypothesis-adoption. He chose to defend belief rather than hypothesis-adoption, in the case of theism especially, for clear and sound reasons having to do with the distinctive relation between belief and the strenuous mood, and the implications of that relation for what would constitute the responsible course of conduct in relation to live theism.

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[7] I am using 'believing theism' terminology in order to distinguish a theism which is believed, from theisms such as those spoken about by Bertrand Russell, James Wernham and others, which are hypothetical or are the result of an intellectual gamble or of a form of action involving no belief.

My contextualization of liveness, the strenuous mood and passional nature within the terms of reference of James's broader accounts of the field of awareness in general, and particularly of immediate experience, needs to be defended from the outset, for in 1907 James wrote to Horace Kallen that *The Will to Believe* should be kept distinct from his other work.[8] There are two sets of considerations which ought to prevent this passing comment by James from prohibiting a contextualization of *The Will to Believe*. First, as has been pointed out by Ralph Barton Perry, the letter in which James makes such a recommendation,

> while it divides the doctrine of 'pragmatism' and the 'will to believe,' also points the way to their union. For if verification is a sort of 'satisfactoriness' then truth becomes in some broad sense commensurable with those subjective values which justify belief in the absence of verification. So the way is paved for the general idea of truth as the goodness of ideas on the whole, where agreement with fact, though it may take precedence, is only one value among others."[9]

John Wild has argued that "these statements [encouraging a separation of *The Will to Believe*] were made for special purposes, and cannot be taken too seriously. They have a biographic rather than a systematic

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[8] Letter of W. James to H. M. Kallen, 1907, R. B. Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1935), 2: 249.

[9] Ibid.

significance."[10] James Wernham upholds the separation that James recommended, but his argument on behalf of such a position depends upon his own distinctive contention, in relation to *The Will to Believe*, that "we have no intellectual ground for believing . . . [theism],"[11] and so must make a "pure gamble"--a position which I will show to be untenable.

The second consideration which ought to prevent James's comment from prohibiting a contextualization of *The Will to Believe* is the degree to which the essay itself borrows liberally from James's thought on many subjects including volition, belief, and so on, thought which to a significant extent remained generally stable over the years. Such stability is not a surprising phenomenon, given the relatively late stage in his career at which he began producing his major works, and the resulting shortness of time which elapsed between the publication of the *Principles*, and his later writings about religion and about Radical Empiricism. While some sections of the *Principles* were developed during his earlier career, that work as a whole was completed and published only when James was 49 years of age. While it is 'early' in terms of the sequence

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[10] John Wild, *The Radical Empiricism of William James* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1969), 331.

[11] Wernham, *Heretical*, 91.

of his literary output, it is not early in terms of his life or of the development of his thought overall.

A demonstration on my part of such general stability and coherence in James's work would needlessly duplicate what has already been done widely and thoroughly. It is true that James made significant changes in his position on the relation of knower and object known, for example, and I will note these in due course. Such change as did occur after the production of the *Principles*, however, is often foreshadowed even in that early work. The dualism of knower and known, for instance, which is admittedly more prominent in earlier writing, can already be seen breaking down within the *Principles* itself. One can trace here "the demise of dualism in the *Principles*," Wilshire, as well as Edie and others have shown, "and the emergence of phenomenal monism and incipient phenomenology."[12] The extensive work of both Charlene Seigfried and Gerald Myers, among others, also supports the judgement that there is a continuity between James's early and later work on the relation of knower and known. Both authors underscore the provisionality of the methodological priorities which lay behind James's dualism of knower and known in the *Principles*. The purpose of the *Principles* had been to further the development of psychology as a natural

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[12] James Edie, *William James and Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 32. See also 26.

science. James worked hard, therefore, at restraining his spontaneous philosophical impulse, given the relevant methodological restraints involved in psychology conceived of as a natural science, to engage in what he even early on saw as the philosophical need to question such dualism. Notwithstanding the periodically dualistic language in *Principles*, then, there are signs in that work itself of the more unified view of Radical Empiricism which, as John J. McDermott once put it, "was simmering but had not yet been announced."

The high level of detail in Myers' outstanding recent study of James has contributed a good deal to illuminating continuity among the various stages of James's thought on many other issues as well. These include his contention that perceptual experience of the world is pervasively informed by human interest. Such a position long predates even the *Principles*, Myers shows, and endures throughout James's career. James always denied that

> knowledge is ever simply impressed upon one who only passively feels things. The active participation of the knower is required in noticing, attending, naming, classifying, and predicting; without it there would be only feeling and acquaintance but no genuine knowledge. Active attending or noticing is equated with willing, which led Perry to say that the most important of James's insights in psychology was that knowledge depends ultimately upon will. This idea, customarily associated with his later writings on pragmatism and religion, was already consolidated in *Principles*.[13]

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[13] Gerald Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 276.

Edie has made parallel observations.[14]

James's later view that mental states can be compounded of other mental states, Myers also shows, can be found in the 1895 essay, "The Knowing of Things Together," a piece written a year before *The Will to Believe*.[15] Moreover, James's concerns, in line with Bergson's, about the impact of conceptualization upon the flow of immediate experience may well have been held even while he was writing the *Principles*.[16] In addition, the links between will, attention, intellectual life and psychological health also date back to the *Principles*.[17] So too do James's accounts of the nature of thought found in "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results," the inaugural essay on Pragmatism.[18] As to the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, while James's thought attains greater maturity in his later philosophy of Radical Empiricism, the signs of that maturity can be found in early writings.[19]

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[14] Edie, *William James and Phenomenology*, 31.

[15] Myers, *James: His Life and Thought*, 110. See also 355.

[16] Ibid., 130.

[17] Ibid., 214.

[18] Ibid., 261.

[19] Ibid., 263.

Equally traceable to such earlier thought are his positions on self and on free will.[20]

Even Pragmatism itself, Myers has illustrated, "was first formulated in *Principles*."[21] For its part, Radical Empiricism as well can be found already emerging in the 1885 essay, "The Function of Cognition," and in the 1895 essay, "The Knowing of Things Together"--writings that, McDermott regrets, Perry unfortunately left out of the 1912 collection of *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. The particular doctrine of Radical Empiricism that mind and its objects are two aspects of pure experience, while maturing relatively late in James's career, nevertheless rested upon an insight which "had been attractive to him even some years prior to the completion of *Principles*, and it was responsible for the doubts about Cartesian dualism sprinkled throughout that book."[22]

It has been one of John Wild's particular achievements to have illustrated the extent to which Radical Empiricism "presupposes the whole of his earlier Psychology to be properly understood."[23] James Edie has shown likewise that the *Principles* "lays the groundwork for all

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[20] Ibid., 352-353.

[21] Ibid., 563.

[22] Ibid., 57-58.

[23] Wild, *Radical Empiricism*, 377. See also 366.

his later more popular essays and lectures."[24] John J. McDermott's analyses as well have established that "the 'psychology,' 'will to believe,' 'radical empiricism,' and 'pragmatism' are of a piece in his philosophy."[25] Kauber and Hare have even argued that the only way of making *The Will to Believe* intelligible is by setting it in the context of James's philosophy as a whole.[26] They contend not only that James's larger philosophy assists one in interpreting *The Will to Believe*, but that on particular issues "the remainder of James's philosophy virtually dictates" a certain interpretation of the essay.[27] Among Edie, Wild, McDermott, Seigfried, Myers and others, then, can be found significant agreement to the effect that James's later work tends on many major subjects to articulate with greater maturity rather than to overturn entirely "lines already laid down"[28] in the *Principles*.

Given these considerations, I will contextualize *The Will to Believe* when the essay appears to be significantly indebted to some aspect James's thought developed outside of

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[24] Edie, *William James and Phenomenology*, 24. See also 46, 73.

[25] John J. McDermott, *The Writings of William James*, xxxiii.

[26] Peter Kauber and Peter Hare, "The Right and Duty to Will to Believe," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, IV (1974), 329. See also 341.

[27] Ibid., 329.

[28] Edie, *William James and Phenomenology*, 46.

it. This will be the case particularly with respect to James's account of the complex unity of immediate experience, for it is only within such terms of reference that the role assigned by James to passional nature in connection with liveness and the strenuous mood can be grasped as James intended.

Chapter One

BACKGROUND, STRUCTURE AND RECEPTION OF *THE WILL TO BELIEVE*

The Will to Believe was first presented to the Philosophical Clubs of Brown and Yale Universities in 1896. It was subsequently printed in *New World* in 1896,[1] then reprinted in 1897[2] and in 1917.[3] The general pattern of argument in the essay can be found emerging in a review by James of *The Unseen Universe* by P. G. Tait in 1875.[4] In that review, James speaks about a "duty" to believe, holding that belief in a transcendent realm was not only permissible but was a belief which one may be duty-bound to hold if it would, for the believer, be a source of commendable action or peace of mind. In the review of Tait's work James characterizes the abdication of such a duty to hold salutory

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[1] William James, "The Will to Believe," *New World* 5 (1896), 327-347.

[2] William James, "The Will to Believe," *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York and London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897).

[3] William James, "The Will to Believe," *Selected Papers on Philosophy* (London: Dent and Co., New York: E. P. Dutton, 1917).

[4] William James, Review of *The Unseen Universe*, *Nation*, XX (1875), 366-367.

beliefs as a residual consequence of overextended "'scientific' scruples." His choice of duty terminology in the review appears to have had its origins in his contact with the work of Charles Renouvier to whom James announced his indebtedness at the outset of his presentation of *The Will to Believe*.

James seems gradually to have drifted away from the influence of Renouvier, however, and away also from a duty-to-believe position.[5] The influence of Chauncey Wright, the Cambridge philosopher and James's personal friend, was instrumental in this regard. Despite their philosophical agreement on a number of issues Wright was markedly antagonistic towards James's review in the *Nation*. In a letter to Grace Norton in July of 1875 Wright reported a conversation that he had had with James about the offending passages.[6] Wright had told James that the *Nation* account, as it stood, appeared to undermine the importance of evidence in the formation of beliefs, an impression which James later said that he had not intended to give. As a result of the conversation with Wright, James abandoned duty terminology. As Wright put it: "he agreed that attention to all accessible evidence was the only duty involved in

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[5] Edward Madden, "Introduction," William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1979), xviii-xix.

[6] Letter of C. Wright to Grace Norton, July 12, 1875, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 1: 530-532.

belief."[7] The accuracy of Wright's report that James had decided to abandon duty terminology is borne out by the fact that the term is not used again by James to describe his position after 1875.[8]

While James abandoned duty terminology, he retained a variety of other terms over the years to describe his position. In a letter to Mark Baldwin in 1899 concerning criticisms of *The Will to Believe* by Dickinson Miller, James expressed the belated wish that he had entitled his essay "a defense of faith, or words to that effect."[9] In another letter in 1901 he again expressed regret for having opted for *The Will to Believe* title, proposing in its place "Critique of Pure Faith" as a possible improvement.[10] It is in terms, however, of a "right" or a "will" to believe, in the end, that James seems ultimately to have found himself best able to convey his position. He showed a preference for the former, "right," as late as 1904 when he wrote to L. T. Hobhouse that his essay should have been

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[7] Ibid., 531.

[8] Even Hare and Kauber, who argue that this apparent retreat from the original association of duty with belief was a mistake on James's part, admit that there is no evidence that James maintained a doctrine of a duty to believe after 1875. (Kauber and Hare, "Right and Duty," 327-343).

[9] Letter of W. James to Mark Baldwin, 1899, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 243.

[10] Letter of W. James to Mark Baldwin, Oct 24, 1901, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 244.

entitled "The *Right* to Believe,"[11] a preference borne out by Dickinson Miller who also reports that James had expressed an attraction to the term.[12]

In general, then, the position which James was attempting to put forward in *The Will to Believe* was a position which developed publically between the 1875 review in the *Nation,* and later correspondence following the essay's publication. That position seems to have centred upon the notion of a "right" and a "will" rather than a "duty" having to do with certain sorts of beliefs under particular circumstances. Later comments to the effect that a better title would have been "a defense of faith, or words to that effect" echo the opening passages of the essay as we now have it, according to which its focus is upon a defense of "a believing attitude in religious matters."[13]

Most secondary literature on *The Will to Believe*, which includes two monographs published during the 1980's,[14] indicates that James had given the impression of having promoted a questionable intrusion of personal

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[11] Letter of W. James to L.T. Hobhouse, Aug. 12, 1904, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 245.

[12] James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, 254. See also Kauber and Hare, "Right and Duty," 330.

[13] James, "Will to Believe," 88.

[14] R. J. O'Connell, *William James on the Courage to Believe* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1984); Wernham, *Heretical*.

influences into the intellectual domain. This body of work is characterized by "mainly hostile criticisms,"[15] principal among which has been the charge that James was commending wishful thinking. Peirce and Dewey, for example, were both critical of *The Will to Believe* on this count. "I thought your *Will to Believe* was a very exaggerated utterance, such as injures a serious man very much,"[16] complained Peirce, and Dewey regretted what he thought had been James's effort to identify too closely *any* good which might accrue from embracing a proposition, with the truth of such a proposition. Dewey was dismayed by James's apparent suggestion that the short-term satisfaction of emotional and other subjective states ought to have a major if not definitive role in the determination of truth in the absence of persuasive evidence. Peirce would have concurred with Dewey's insistence that the only form of satisfaction which is directly pertinent to determining truth is the satisfaction of one's expectations regarding the outcome of experiment.[17]

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[15] Kauber and Hare, "Right and Duty," 327.

[16] Letter of C. S. Peirce to W. James, March 9, 1909, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 438.

[17] Gail Kennedy, "Pragmatism, Pragmaticism, and The Will to Believe--A Reconsideration," *The Journal of Philosophy*, LV (1958), 583.

Comparable concerns in more recent literature are typified by John Hick's analyses.[18] James's essay, Hick argues, takes Pascal's Wager, and the wager's depiction of belief as "a game of chance," as its "pilot scheme."[19] One therefore finds an "essentially sporting nature . . . [in his] attitude to these ultimate issues of belief."[20] While conceding that James's conception of God may involve more benevolence than Pascal's "touchy eastern potentate," James's argument is otherwise identical to Pascal's, Hick contends, and as Pascal's "prudent gamble" has been so offensive to many philosophers over the years for its apparent self-serving character, so the belief advocated by James is no less offensive. Such belief consists of "treating as certain a proposition which you know (or believe) is not certain,"[21] and doing so for purposes of personal benefit. James essentially advocates "wishful thinking,"[22] that is, approving of assent to any

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[18] John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 32-56.

[19] Ibid., 34. Hick's work in this respect has the distinctive merit of relating James's position to the position of Pascal, whereas most commentators have remained preoccupied with its relation to Clifford. I will later undertake a closer analysis of the relation between the positions of James and Pascal.

[20] Ibid., 40.

[21] Ibid., 35.

[22] Ibid., 44.

proposition that is not demonstrably false and "which . . . might be advantageous to us."[23] In essence, charges Hick,

> is he not saying that since the truth is unknown to us we may believe what we like and that while we are about it we had better believe what we like most? This is certainly unjust to James's intention; but is it unjust to the logic of his argument? I do not see that it is.[24]

Bertrand Russell had kindred reservations about James's position. He was particularly concerned about pragmatic epistemology's consequence-oriented understanding of belief, especially in cases such as theism in which "the proposition in question has an emotional interest on its own account."[25] A factually false proposition in such cases could be emotionally rewarding, Russell argued, and so could 'work' in such a way that it could be deemed to be true by pragmatic standards. In essence, then, Russell charged in the wishful thinking vein, James ends up being "prepared to advocate any doctrine which tends to make people virtuous and happy; if it does so, it is 'true' in the sense in which he uses that word."[26]

While the most common charge against *The Will to Believe* has been along the foregoing wishful thinking lines, some commentators have also criticized the essay for its

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[23] Ibid., 42.

[24] Ibid., 44.

[25] Russell, *Philosophical Essays*, 189.

[26] Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 770.

position on the relation between belief and hypothesis-adoption. As early as 1899 the presence of both these elements was recognized in James's position by Mark Baldwin, for example. Baldwin did not single out a problem in this respect, however, for he was agreeable to the notion that a "more-or-less-vaguely-grounded-hypothesis may rightly be an object of genuine belief."[27] Bertrand Russell would later be less accommodating. James's position was seriously compromised, Russell charged, by its having borrowed heavily from a model of scientific hypothesis-adoption in which, James had failed to recognize, "belief is absent."[28] James, that is, in commending belief in the religious "hypothesis," had essentially proposed an understanding of belief modeled after an activity which involves no belief.

Russell's concerns with respect to hypothesis-adoption and belief have recently been taken up by James Wernham, but have been given a distinctive twist. James's authorization for adopting belief in advance of appropriate evidential justification, Wernham agrees, involves a failure to distinguish properly between belief and hypothesis-adoption, but it also involves more than this. For Wernham, theism cannot function even hypothetically--for reasons I will outline later--and need not be believed in order to be

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[27] Letter of Mark Baldwin to W. James, 1899, in Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 242.

[28] Russell, *Philosophical Essays*, 189.

embraced. When one sorts through the various dimensions of James's errors in this area, according to Wernham's "heretical" analysis, *The Will to Believe* turns out to be about neither belief, as scholarly orthodoxy has traditionally held,[29] nor even about hypothesis-adoption. It is, rather, about an obligation which "is prudential, not moral,"[30] to undertake a "pure" gamble on theism.

It is Dickinson Miller who stands apart among commentators for having not only recognized potential problems in James's position regarding the relation between belief and hypothesis-adoption, but for having been able as well to connect these with what James says in *The Will to Believe* about the liveness of certain options and propositions. James's position, Miller thought, rested upon a "deep confusion between belief and will," and a related, erroneous application of the notion of 'hypothesis' to cases of religious belief.[31] "In proportion . . . as it [a proposition] is literally a hypothesis it is not a belief," argued Miller, and insofar as it is not a belief, its status can be in no way affected by volition but only by further evidence which may in turn support claims to its probable

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[29] Wernham, *Heretical*, 3.

[30] Ibid., 3.

[31] Dickinson Miller, "James's Doctrine of 'The Right to Believe,'" *The Philosophical Review*, LI (1942), 548.

truth and entitlement to assent.[32] On the other hand, "in proportion as it [a proposition] is actually a belief it is not an hypothesis."[33] Volition is once again excluded, for a belief "is not a voluntary conception; it is precisely an involuntary conception;"[34] one believes certain things because they impose themselves upon the believer "of their own accord, without any interference from our will . . . If *we* arrange them according to our wish, that is not belief but imagination."[35] In sum, then, for Miller, "so far from faith being synonymous with working-hypothesis the two ideas are mutually exclusive."[36]

Further exacerbating the liabilities in James's position with respect to belief and hypothesis-adoption, on Miller's view, was the nebulousness of James's account of truth. Truth, for James, Miller remarks critically, is not "a thing largely charted, largely based on definite principles of thinking." It is, rather, "an *aperçu*, a piercing glance of insight, a thing unique in each case, which often, and especially in the highest cases, could not

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[32] Ibid., 547.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 548.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 547.

be brought to book or turned into argument."[37] If truth were ultimately about such insight, Miller objects, then the utility of the many logical and analytic tools normally used to distinguish probability from desirability would be hopelessly compromised, making way for the wholesale intrusion of self-interest. The nebulousness of the procedures that James proposed in lieu of such conventional analytic tools, says Miller, leaves James's readers in the dark regarding just how his tests "*are* tests of truth, how they are experimental, how they prove the point, how far they prove it, and how long they take to prove it."[38] The fallibility of conventional procedures to which James is fond of calling attention, Miller protests, does not overturn the fact that even "where logic is not a test of certain truth, it is very frequently a signal test of probability."[39] Miller concluded, in line with much secondary literature on the essay which attacks James for commending wishful thinking, that "the intervention of 'our passional nature,' of which James approves, is that which

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[37] Ibid., 546. In his correspondence with Benjamin Paul Blood James describes the acquisition of truth in such terms, referring to "lightning flashes, darting gleams . . . that's the way truth is." (Letter of W. James to Benjamin Blood, April 28, 1897, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 234). This aspect of James's position will become more central in later chapters of this dissertation in connection with the centrality of metaphor in James's epistemology.

[38] Ibid., 551.

[39] Ibid.

chiefly interferes, in all human beings, with good and trustworthy judgement,"[40] and he remained convinced over many years that "'the will to believe' is the will to deceive oneself; it is the will to regard something as true which is doubtful."[41]

In Miller's case, however, such familiar charges were rooted in a distinctively clear-sighted recognition of the importance of liveness in James's position. James's "irresponsible"[42] disregard for conventional criteria of truth and for the "slowly gathered and painstaking processes that have evinced themselves the surest reliance of our race"[43] had led to a confusion of the personal desirability of a proposition with its argumentatively and evidentially-based probability, a confusion which Miller located at the heart of James's account of liveness. James, Miller charged, "declines to discriminate . . . [probability] from such inducements to belief as attractions, values, appeals to desire. Probability and desirability alike he calls 'liveliness.'"[44] Not only had James 'declined' to discriminate probability from desire in the case of liveness, Miller also recognized, he had claimed as well

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 553.

[42] Ibid., 546.

[43] Ibid., 552.

[44] Ibid., 546.

that it is sometimes that case that "amongst the inducements to belief we cannot separate probability from desirability,"[45] a point which will turn out to be significant as my study unfolds, for it is directly related to the way in which James understood subject and world to be simultaneously implicated in the constitution of experience.[46]

The pattern of critical analysis of *The Will to Believe* set out above exists against the background of James's own protestations that he had been improperly understood, and against the background of support, by a

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Before passing on to James's response to his critics, it should be noted that some commentators have conceded the wishful thinking charges but have tried to rescue James from philosophical culpability for having proposed a position which moves in such a direction. Stephen Davis, for example, portrays James as having separated subjective states from intellectual ones and as having made the former serve as grounds for belief in a way which amounts to an endorsement of wishful thinking, but Davis defends such a position by arguing that wishful thinking is necessary under the conditions set out in James's essay. (Stephen Davis, "Wishful Thinking and 'The Will to Believe,'" *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 8 [1972], 237). James Muyskens also interprets James as having defended a "very liberal or weak standard for justified belief" which "verges on the irresponsible" sufficiently to be susceptible of charges of wishful thinking. Muyskens attempts to rescue James by suggesting that "instead of seeing James's task as the attempt to justify the belief that p, we can . . . reasonably reinterpret his remarks to be an attempt to justify hope that p," a position which "does not require giving up the strong Lockean criterion of justified belief." (James Muyskens, "James's Defense of a Believing Attitude in Religion," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 10 [Winter, 1974], 53).

minority of commentators, of James's contentions to this effect. Mark Baldwin, James claimed, for example, had been attacking a "man of straw,"[47] while F. H. Bradley and A. E. Taylor had failed dismally to grasp his intentions.[48] In 1904 James wrote to L. T. Hobhouse, who had published a critique of *The Will to Believe* that year, disclaiming the position attributed to him by Hobhouse and claiming that Hobhouse's own position was the one that he, James, had in fact intended to propose.[49] Hobhouse had held that feeling has a legitimate role in the formation of belief because it is often a compelling "forerunner of thought." James insists that his own advocacy of a place for feeling in the life of the intellect was, like Hobhouse's, based upon its link with reasoning, a link which James had tried, he said, to protect.[50]

Such protestations by James are also reflected in his response to an opponent from the fideistic end of the religious spectrum. In March of 1897 James received a

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[47] Letter of W. James to Mark Baldwin, 1901, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 243.

[48] F.H. Bradley, "On Truth and Practice," *Mind*, XIII (1904); A.E. Taylor "Some Side Lights on Pragmatism," *The McGill University Magazine*, III (1903-4). See Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 246.

[49] L.T. Hobhouse, "Faith and the Will to Believe," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, IV (1904), 91, 104-105, 109. See Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 245.

[50] Letter of W. James to L. T. Hobhouse, Aug. 12, 1904, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 245.

letter from a strongly evangelical fideist, John Chapman, who criticized him for having recommended that any evidential support at all be sought for religious belief. While diplomatically indulgent of Chapman, James rejects Chapman's fideism, arguing that there must be an intellectual root for religious belief.[51]

The contention that James had been misunderstood has been advanced as well by philosophers other than James himself. Gail Kennedy has argued to this effect, for example, based in part upon his analysis of exchanges between James and Dewey. Dewey saw James, he argues, as having come to place too much weight on personal satisfaction in the determination of truth, and both Dewey and Peirce had proposed, as seen above, that only "*that* satisfaction which arises when the idea as working hypothesis or tentative method is applied to prior existences in such a way as to fulfil what it intends" is a satisfaction which ought to influence judgements regarding truth or falsity.[52] What is notable, Kennedy points out, is that James agreed with Dewey on this in a 1907 letter.[53]

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[51] Letter of W. James to John Chapman, April 5, 1897, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 237. See Madden, "Introduction," xxi.

[52] John Dewey, in Kennedy, "Reconsideration," 583.

[53] Letter of W. James to Horace Kallen, Aug. 1, 1907, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 249. See Kennedy, "Reconsideration," 583-584.

Kennedy's thesis is that Dewey and Peirce had misunderstood James. Dewey and Peirce, assuming a scientific context, had been thinking about long term truth-seeking from a "standard observer" point of view, allowing for repeated trial and error and an ongoing assessment of the results of such trial and error. James would have agreed with what they had had to say on this count, he thinks. James's question, however, had been a different one; his was a question about the dynamics of the short-run situation in which a decision must be taken without the luxury of an extended testing process. "James did not intend to alter Peirce's criteria of verification, he merely intended to extend their application" to situations which had not formerly been taken into account.[54]

James, Dewey and Peirce, in other words, according to Kennedy, had been arguing at cross purposes, not recognizing that they were applying essentially the same pragmatic method to significantly different circumstances. "In making James's extension [of the views of Dewey and Peirce to the short term] there is no need . . . to alter the *method*."[55] Rather, the various elements involved in that method--verification, sense experience, desire etc.--operate somewhat differently. The verificatory moves

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[54] Kennedy, "Reconsideration," 587.

[55] Ibid.

further into the background and the volitional moves more prominently into the foreground.

There are a number of other commentators who have also held that James had been misunderstood, although they differ in their interpretations of the exact form which such misunderstanding has taken. Madden, for example, is convinced that "James was genuinely misunderstood in his will-to-believe doctrine,"[56] and that it is "a gross misreading to hold that James advocated believing whatever one wants if so doing makes one happy or has any need-fulfilling results."[57]

> It is not that Renouvier or James thought that affective and volitional elements determine decisions beyond the capacity of the individual to control--far from it, since their view is not a variation on scepticism or sociology-of-knowledge viewpoints--but rather that affective and volitional elements have a legitimate epistemic role to play in reaching certain decisions"[58]

The root of James's having been misunderstood, in Madden's judgement, is that he had in fact advanced two forms of argument, one strong and one weak, and had subsequently vacillated between the two under different historical circumstances.[59] The stronger position, for which he was indebted to Charles Renouvier, holds that one

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[56] Madden, "Introduction," xxiii.

[57] Ibid., xxxviii.

[58] Ibid., xviii.

[59] Ibid., xxiii, xxiv.

has a duty as well as a right to believe,[60] whereas the later, weaker position, for which he was indebted to Chauncey Wright, seems to permit believing under certain circumstances where evidence is inconclusive.

Kennedy also identifies two different doctrines--a 'right' to believe and a 'will' to believe--which he thinks have been "sadly confused"[61] by commentators. Instead of distinguishing these chronologically, however, as Madden does, he finds them both contained, albeit not adequately distinguished, in *The Will to Believe* itself. The *right* to believe is present when one is forced to make a momentous decision for which there is not adequate evidence. The *will* to believe has to do with what James calls self-verifying beliefs--cases where "faith creates its own verification." Volition, on Kennedy's account, has a distinct and different role in each such situation. In cases of self-verifying beliefs it can rightly play a prominent role in the formation of belief because the states of affairs involved in those cases contribute to the creation of the truth of the propositions involved. The formation of personal confidence, for example, that I can leap a wide mountain crevice is an important element in the eventual accomplishment of that feat. In cases of non-self-verifying

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[60] Ibid., xv-xvi.

[61] Kennedy, "Reconsideration," 580.

beliefs, however, James denies to volition a comparable role.

The view that James had been misunderstood was also held by F. C. S. Schiller. Schiller records that during a debate with Charles Strong he came to the conviction that the breadth of misunderstanding of James's *Will to Believe* had been a function of the essay's demand for empirical verification having been so consistently ignored. It was for this reason, Schiller claimed, that James's appeal to will had so often been "misconstrued . . . as an incitement to make-believe, instead of as an analysis of the psychological process of acquiring beliefs."[62] Schiller's interpretation of *The Will to Believe*, as later approved by James, was that "a 'will to find out' is an essential preliminary to finding out: in all knowing it is the will which starts the process, while the final shape of our beliefs is moulded by the results of our experiments."[63]

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[62] Letter of F. C. S. Schiller to Charles Strong, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 241.

[63] Ibid. Certain recurrent biographical considerations have also been invoked in connection with the possibility that James had been misunderstood. Madden has cautioned that too much can be made of James's recourse to volition during his psychological crisis of 1870. (Madden, "Introduction," xxvii). Other features of James's personality have been brought into consideration as well. Madden, for example, points out that James was not a person who was at all easily disposed temperamentally to believe or to make intellectual decisions lightly. On the contrary, he was someone who held back his intellectual assent until much inquiry had taken place and until significant argument and evidence, had been marshalled (Ibid., xxiii).

In sum, the dominant feature of the secondary literature on James's essay is the accusation that he commended an unacceptable intrusion of the subject, as subject, into doxastic practice under certain special conditions, and that he confused belief and hypothesis-adoption. Dickinson Miller stands alone in having linked such concerns to the notion of liveness. Rejoinders by James's defenders have not responded in adequate depth and detail to what Miller clear-sightedly recognized was James's claim that the subject and world are related in the constitution of experience in such a way that probability and desirability are often very difficult to disentangle introspectively in cases of live propositions. Why such a claim by James would not force him into an endorsement of wishful thinking has not been made adequately clear so far

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One ought not to overlook as well the effect upon the reception of James's essay of its rhetorical character. James's addresses were closely geared to the public circumstances of their delivery. He was chided by his friend, Benjamin Paul Blood, for example, for the "oratorical effect" such lectures. (Letter of Benjamin Blood to W. James, April 18, 1897, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 233). The rhetorical and non-technical character of those lectures has not always been taken adequately into account by commentators. Some years after delivering *The Will to Believe*, corresponding with L. T. Hobhouse, James observed that "each man writes from out of a field of consciousness of which the bogey in the background is the chief object." (Letter of W. James to L. T. Hobhouse, Aug. 12, 1904, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 246). It is crucial to clarify what bogey was involved in *The Will to Believe*. James's bogey was the spectre of a widespread and growing antagonism towards religious belief which was denying to such belief even the preliminary benefit of the doubt to which James thought it entitled.

in the literature on *The Will to Believe*. My first step in trying to rectify such a situation will involve a closer scrutiny of what James has to say about liveness.

Chapter Two

THE RETRIEVAL OF 'LIVENESS' IN *THE WILL TO BELIEVE*

Throughout the century since it was written, *The Will to Believe* has been generally taken as arguing in favour of the permissibility of *adopting* certain forms of belief, in advance of adequate evidence on their behalf, for the purposes of securing the desirable consequences which flow from such beliefs. Widespread criticisms of the essay for having sponsored wishful thinking and having confused belief and hypothesis-adoption have been directed at such a position. I will argue in this chapter that such a position was not the one advanced by James in his essay.

What James is concerned about above all in *The Will to Believe* is the significance of *abandoning* certain existing beliefs or propensities to believe, not creating them. The longstanding neglect of this crucial feature of his position has been a function of a widespread disregard for one of the three main distinguishing characteristics of the options and propositions of interest to James in his essay: their *liveness*. It is to a recovery of the centrality of that aspect of James's essay that this chapter is devoted.

At the outset of *The Will to Believe* James includes alongside the forced and momentous nature of certain options or hypotheses of concern to his essay, the liveness of such options and hypotheses. Liveness possesses three main characteristics. The first of these has to do with belief. Liveness, says James in correspondence with Mark Baldwin concerning *The Will to Believe*, involves "a will of complacence, assent, encouragement, towards *a belief already there*" (italics mine),[1] and live theism in particular is described on a number of occasions in *The Will to Believe* in terms of religious "belief,"[2] an "active faith,"[3] and a "believing attitude."[4] James qualifies such a characterization of liveness, however, by adding that the state he has in mind is "not, of course, an absolute belief, but such beliefs as any of us have, strong inclinations to believe, but threatened."[5] As James says regarding Pascal, "unless there be some *pre-existing tendency to believe* in

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[1] Letter of W. James to Mark Baldwin, 1899, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 243.

[2] James, "Will to Believe," 105.

[3] Ibid., 106.

[4] Ibid., 88.

[5] Letter of W. James to Mark Baldwin, 1899, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 243.

masses and holy water, the option offered to the will by Pascal is not a living option" (italics mine).[6]

The main thesis statement of James's essay associates such liveness with *options*, first and foremost, which are said to consist of competing live propositions whose evidential merits are as yet inconclusive. It would seem that liveness would not be a significant consideration in the choice between such propositions since both are themselves said to be live and neither is conclusively superior to the other evidentially. It has been generally assumed that in the absence of conclusive evidential considerations both alternatives make comparable claims upon the subject and that therefore the passional choice between them would be what James Wernham has called a "pure gamble." It is not difficult to understand how charges involving the intrusion of the subject and wishful thinking would follow closely upon the heels of such an understanding of James's position.

It is notable in this connection, however, that there is nothing in *The Will to Believe* which says that the competing live propositions in a live option are equally compelling or that there are no grounds whatever, apart from subjective preference, for the reasonableness of adopting one alternative over the other. As I will show below, there is a distinct imbalance, for example, between the

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[6] James, "Will to Believe," 91.

alternatives in the case of the religious option, as it is portrayed by James. What is more, while evidential considerations are not sufficient to tip the balance decisively in one direction or the other in live options, it should be noted that James goes out of his way repeatedly to confine such evidential inconclusiveness to the level of "pure reason,"[7] "pure insight and logic,"[8] the "purely judging mind,"[9] the "pure intellect,"[10] and "pure intellectualism,"[11] and when he defends theistic belief in particular, he stipulates that it is "a defence of our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our *merely* logical intellect may not have been coerced" (italics mine).[12] Such restrictions suggest that there are other considerations supportive of the reasonableness of sustaining a particular belief or propensity to believe, notwithstanding the appeals of its contrary, and I will later show why such influences play a significant justifying role in James's case.

On the whole, then, with respect to the first major characteristic of liveness, I am proposing that James's main

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[7] Ibid., 93.

[8] Ibid., 95.

[9] Ibid., 102.

[10] Ibid., 103.

[11] Ibid., 107.

[12] Ibid., 88.

concern in *The Will to Believe* is with situations in which one has a certain existing belief or propensity to believe which, as he was seen above to have described it to Mark Baldwin, is "threatened" by an alternative proposition towards which one also finds a propensity to believe. How ought one to proceed under such circumstances, James is asking. I may, for example, find myself disposed to believe theistically but find as well that the gratuitous nature of suffering and evil in the world generates a propensity to believe otherwise. Am I entitled, James is asking above all in *The Will to Believe*, to acquiesce in such theism in spite of the propensity to believe its contrary and in spite of insufficient evidence to resolve the matter conclusively? What, in other words, would constitute intellectually responsible behaviour in relation to certain existing beliefs or propensities to believe? James's aim in *The Will to Believe* is to defend the intellectual integrity of acquiescing in some such beliefs or propensities to believe.

That *The Will to Believe* is arguing along such lines emerges more clearly when James singles out the specifically religious option. Here, one encounters a distinctive but neglected level of James's case which has to do with a unique set of characteristics attributed by him to live theism. Such theism is deeply rooted in the "heart" and the "instincts,"[13] James contends, and in "good-will."[14] It is

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[13] Ibid., 108.

something residing deep in one's "nature," and it involves a tenacious "passional need."[15] It is far from being simply another intellectual possibility which may be casually adopted or dropped at will; it is, rather, "*forced* on us we know not whence" (italics mine).[16] It is accompanied, moreover, by an uniquely persistent intuitive sense, among many people at least, that it must be met "half-way" if its evidential merits are to become fully apparent. It includes, that is, a peculiar sense that the pursuit of the truth in this domain involves a form of "making willing advances"[17] and engaging one's "sympathetic nature" in ways which may not be found in a "purely" abstract and detached analysis of theism. Live theism also often involves a distinctive noetic element, according to *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and a distinctive experience of the world as well, for believers in the Western traditions of religion at least, for whom "the universe is no longer a mere *It* . . . but a *Thou*."[18] Live theism also generates an energizing disposition, intellectual openness, and way of life to which James refers in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" and *The Varieties of Religious Experience* as the

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[14] Ibid., 107.

[15] Ibid., 106.

[16] Ibid., 107.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

"strenuous mood," about which more will be said in Chapter 4. Nowhere in *The Will to Believe* or elsewhere in James's corpus does one find a depiction of the nontheistic alternatives in the religious option as possessing comparably formidable characteristics. The nontheistic alternatives in the live religious option may be "threatening" in certain important respects, but are nowhere portrayed as having as deep a hold upon many human beings as theism.

The main question that James is asking in *The Will to Believe* has to do with what would constitute responsible intellectual conduct in relation to such live theism which possesses this range of characteristics, when and where it is actually found. I emphasize here once again that James is concerned about a particular phenomenon--a widespread *existing* form of belief or propensity to believe. He is not commending the manufacture of a new belief, as is often said of him, much less the manufacture of a new belief for the self-serving purpose of deriving the exclusively personal benefits which may accrue from holding such a belief, as is also widely held, and which will be shown in Chapter 4 to be untenable. He is asking, rather, what would constitute responsible intellectual conduct in relation to an existing theistic belief or propensity to believe which, while "threatened," nevertheless involves the foregoing host of distinctive characteristics.

There is more to liveness than its involvement of belief or a propensity to believe, however. Such belief or propensity to believe builds upon an *intellectual* plausibility of a proposition for the subject, and here we encounter the second main characteristic of liveness. Such plausibility involves more than just cultural familiarity, as might be suggested by James's example of the liveness to an Arab, by contrast with a non-Arab, of potential belief in the Mahdi. It is not just a purely hypothetical possibility either, which may be suggested by James's description of a live hypothesis as simply "among the mind's options." Anticipating the discomfort of his audience about the position he is developing, James warns near the end of *The Will to Believe* that those in attendance might well have been insufficiently attentive to the intellectual component of liveness.

> You . . . are thinking (perhaps without realizing it) of some particular religious hypothesis which for you is dead. The freedom to 'believe what we will' you apply to the case of some patent superstition; and the faith you think of is the faith defined by the schoolboy when he said 'Faith is when you believe something that you know ain't true.' I can only repeat that this is misapprehension. In concreto, the freedom to believe can only cover living options which the intellect of the individual cannot by itself resolve; and living options never seem absurdities to him who has them to consider.[19]

James contrasts a proposition which for a member of his audience is utterly implausible--a "patent superstition"--

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[19] Ibid., 108.

with a proposition held by that audience member which, for that member at least, would be plausible ("living options never seem absurdities *to him* who has them to consider"). What outside observer is qualified, James asks in a letter to Mark Baldwin about *The Will to Believe*, to make a judgement about such plausibility? What standard would allow for a determination of "*how* sincere" the conscientious individual is, or "*how* adequate or inadequate the 'evidence' to him may seem?"[20] Numerous beliefs which are now widely vindicated have seemed highly implausible to many people at the time of their emergence.

James's cautionary words regarding liveness near the end of *The Will to Believe* move in the same direction, drawing his audience's attention to the peculiar reasonableness of many propositions to those who hold them, notwithstanding the difficulty which such persons might experience in trying to articulate or defend such reasonableness. His audience, James suggests, ought not to envision *The Will to Believe* as indulging patently unjustifiable propositions held by someone else. Each individual in the audience, he says, rather, ought to envision *The Will to Believe* in terms of its respect for the intellectual plausibility which certain propositions hold for responsible individuals to whom they so appear,

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[20] Letter of W. James to Mark Baldwin, 1899, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 244.

notwithstanding the fact that such plausibility may be threatened in certain ways. James calls for such respect in opposition to those in his audience and culture whose rejection of theism is the rejection of what they consider to be a "patent superstition." He is eager to challenge such dismissiveness as incompatible with the true temper of empiricism. The beliefs or propensities to believe of the kind with which he is concerned in his address, involving as they do the presence of a genuine, but threatened, intellectual plausibility to the subject, and the absence of evidential considerations which would decisively undermine such plausibility, are deserving of respectful benefit of the doubt.

> We ought . . . delicately and profoundly to respect one another's mental freedom: then only shall we bring about the intellectual republic; then only shall we have that spirit of inner tolerance without which all our outer tolerance is soulless, and which is empiricism's glory; then only shall we live and let live in speculative as well as in practical things.[21]

At this basic level, James's argument on behalf of intellectual openness could be invoked as readily for the purposes of defending atheism against an audience of smugly dogmatic theists, as it could be for a defense of theism under the circumstances in which James found himself. If the scales of plausibility in the religious option favour the nontheistic alternative for a particular conscientious individual, James would hold that acquiescence in the

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[21] James, "Will to Believe," 109.

accompanying belief or propensity to believe nontheistically would receive support from the argument of *The Will to Believe*. Such support would not apply, however, to the fashionable anti-theism which James was seen previously to have identified as the "bogey" in response to which his essay was written, but would apply to a position which acknowledges the unnerving consequences of atheism, as these would later in the century be characterized by Sartre, for example, or to an agnosticism which is more than an atheism of convenience.

James's defence of intellectual tolerance and openness brings to the fore the third major characteristic of live propositions, and this has to do with the complex interdependence of many influences which give rise to liveness. This complexity makes the issue about what would constitute responsible behaviour towards live propositions a particularly difficult one, and raises questions about the simplistic character of Clifford's recourse to evidence *per se*.

In the century-long debate about *The Will to Believe*, I indicated in the previous chapter, only Dickinson Miller recognized not only the centrality of liveness in James's position, but the centrality to the notion of liveness of James's reticence about our ability in many cases to disentangle the respective contributions to liveness of numerous influences, personal and impersonal.

Instead of exploring further why James would have held such a position, however, Miller attacked it straightaway as necessarily leading to an intrusion of the subject in belief formation. In so proceeding, Miller failed to explore some important elements of *The Will to Believe* and other writings in James's corpus which support James's position.

With respect to *The Will to Believe* in particular, for example, Miller failed to explore fully why James so strenuously develops his contention that in actual inquiry, "pure insight and logic, whatever they might do ideally, are not the only things that really do produce our creeds."[22] Most of *The Will to Believe*, commentators have generally failed to note, is in fact spent labouring to establish the complexity of the relationships among the many influences which "really do produce our creeds," and the essay does so, ultimately, with the purpose of thwarting the assuredness with which some members of James's audience and culture feel entitled to call for the abandonment of live propositions as complex and existentially influential as those involved in religious matters. The elusive way in which many such influences intertwine in giving rise to the liveness of the propositions involved in such belief systems ought to raise serious questions about automatically impugning and overturning beliefs whose empirically evidential merits are as yet inconclusive. Norms of responsible intellectual

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[22] Ibid., 95.

conduct in relation to such live propositions must be developed with the complexity of liveness fully in view, James is arguing, lest, construing rationality too narrowly or simplistically, we adopt what will turn out in the long run to have been an "irrational"[23] form of behaviour, a point to which I will return. The failure to take account of all such influences in the development of norms for responsible intellectual conduct risks creating only a facade of doxastic responsibility behind which subjectivity may continue to exercise a powerful, and unregulated influence, as James argues that it does even in Clifford's case.

On the face of it, Clifford seems to have provided a sensible response to the complexity of the intellectual life. In cases which preclude a disentangling of the many foregoing influences, we ought to waive our assent until we become able to decide matters more clearly, and thereby protect a firm evidential basis for the life of belief. One of James's main aims in *The Will to Believe* is to put such a position to the test in the light of the complexity of the life of reason which he labours at such length to illustrate, as I will show below. Does such counsel from Clifford embody the elimination of the potentially distorting influence of subjectivity in belief formation, or

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[23] Ibid., 107.

does it in the end really only offer an alternative form of involvement for passional nature in belief formation?

Unfortunately, argues James, Clifford's evidentialism only offers an alternative form of involvement for passional nature in belief formation. In Clifford's preoccupation with avoiding error, James observes, Clifford is rightly "critical of many of his desires and fears."[24] Nevertheless, however, his "fear [of error] he slavishly obeys," and to such fear his evidentialism is very much indebted. The depth of this indebtedness is of great interest to James in *The Will to Believe*, given the widespread fashionability of positions such as Clifford's. It is striking that decades of vigorous criticism of James for having condoned the intrusion of sentiment in doxastic practice have not been accompanied by anything like a comparably vigorous pursuit of the significance of James's charge that such intrusion lies at the heart of Clifford's own evidentialism. Even Clifford, James contends, has not been able to disentangle the many influences at work in his own evidentialism. I will return later to further aspects of James's critique of Clifford. For now, I wish only to point out that even James's analysis of Clifford has the complexity of liveness as its backdrop.

The degree to which James's emphasis upon the intertwining of many influences in liveness has been

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[24] Ibid., 100.

neglected in scholarship is surprising. What one finds in the work of most commentators is a routine compartmentalization of such influences which does not seem even to take notice of, much less to engage or to overturn, James's pivotal contention that in the case of many live propositions such influences *together* constitute liveness in a way which is often complicated enough to preclude such a compartmentalization.[25]

Even a cursory overview of the structure of *The Will to Believe* reveals that James is far more interested in pursuing this matter than he is in anything else. His engagement of it takes the form of a long digression which actually makes up the bulk of *The Will to Believe*. Note, for example, that in a work consisting of ten sections, the section as near to the end as Part VIII begins by saying "now, *after all this introduction*, let us go straight at our question" (italics mine).[26] Only near the end of the essay, it becomes apparent, does James get around to dealing with the forced and momentous character of the options which

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[25] See Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Thirteen Pragmatisms. I and II," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 5 (January, 1908), 5-12, 29-39; Paul Henle, "William James: Introduction," Max H. Fisch, ed. *Classic American Philosophers* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951), 115-127; Robert G. Meyers, "The Roots of Pragmatism: Madden on James and Peirce," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 25 (Spring, 1989), 85-123; Edward H. Madden, "Discussing James and Peirce with Meyers," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 25 (Spring, 1989), 123-148.

[26] James, "Will to Believe," 100.

he had announced at the outset as the special concern of his address.

The delay is clearly intentional. He says in Part IV, for instance, after having already presented a good deal of material, that he is going to do even more "preliminary work." He promises in Part VII that his "preliminaries" will soon be done. In fact, between the end of Part I and the middle of Part VIII the forced and momentous character of certain options is referred to only once, and this in a summary one-sentence thesis statement in Part IV.[27] It is a parenthetical exploration of "the actual psychology of human opinion,"[28] and an exploration of the relations among the many influences which "really do produce our creeds," which extends all the way from the end of Part I, in which James defines forced and momentous options, to Part VIII where he returns to that subject.

When we try to inventory the influences which really do produce our creeds, James points out in this long

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[27] It has been contended that the 'forced' aspect of the options of interest to James in his essay is not even integral to his overall case at all. George Mavrodes, for example, has argued to this effect, as have Kauber and Hare who have made an extensive case for the contention that "while James often spoke in terms of forced options and self-fulfilling beliefs, the right to believe is *not* limited by James to these two categories." (George Mavrodes, "James and Clifford on 'The Will to Believe,'" in Keith Yandell, *God Man and Religion: Readings in the Philosophy of Religion* [McGraw-Hill, 1973]: 524-528; Kauber and Hare, "Right and Duty, 334).

[28] James, "Will to Believe," 90.

digression, we encounter a very complex scene. At first, he concedes, it appears as though with most of our convictions we "could do nothing when the intellect had once said its say."[29] It certainly seems, for example, that the conviction that I am in physical pain or that Abraham Lincoln existed or that two one-dollar bills do not add up to one hundred dollars, are independent of any volitional influence. "The talk of believing by our volition seems, then, from one point of view, simply silly."[30] From the point of view of the sciences, moreover, the notion that the subject is to play a significant role in the development of human conviction "is worse than silly, it is vile."[31] The cornerstone of the scientific ideal is disinterestedness, "patience," "postponement," "choking down of preference," as Huxley and Clifford would have it.[32] Moreover, James concedes willingly, "all this strikes one as healthy . . . Free will and simply wishing do seem, in the matter of our credences, to be only fifth wheels to the coach."[33]

Closer scrutiny, however, reveals that a great many convictions, especially those involved in religious, ethical and political belief systems, for example, are deeply

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 92.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 93.

indebted to the influence of "fear and hope, prejudice and passion, imitation and partisanship, and circumpressure of our caste and set" as well as influences "born of the intellectual climate."[34] Among the listeners in James's audience, he notes for instance, there are many who have strong convictions about the democratic system or about molecular physics. Their convictions, he points out, are rooted not just in knowledge of political science or of physics but in social consensus as well--"the intellectual climate." The personal willingness on the part of such people to embrace certain fashionably prestigious conventions in these intellectual domains plays a formidable role in their beliefs. Moreover, the commonplace unwillingness to even consider certain propositions whose unfashionability disposes one to reject them out of hand is in many cases rooted not in any serious analysis of the intellectual merits of the positions involved, but in personal and societal "passional tendencies and volitions [which] run *before* . . . [by contrast with others which run] after belief." Those which run before, of which we are scarcely even aware much of the time, are major influences in the ability to recognize the potential or actual intellectual merits of those propositions. There are, in other words, many different influences which give rise to the liveness--and deadness--of particular propositions.

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[34] Ibid.

James was particularly concerned about this phenomenon in the case of theism whose cultural fortunes, he believed, were on the decline, and it was the spectre of this decline, I showed in the previous chapter, which motivated James to write *The Will to Believe*.

All this is only the beginning of the story, however. The adoption even of basic systems of thought, James points out at various locations in his corpus as well as in *The Will to Believe*, is a complex activity which requires an extensive involvement by the subject. There is no unambiguous evidential basis for the fundamental conviction that scientific categories are productive of completely trustworthy truths. Moreover, "moral scepticism can no more be refuted or proved by logic than intellectual scepticism can."[35] In ethics, "the question of having moral beliefs at all or not having them is decided by our will."[36] In axiology, the same applies: "to compare the *worths*, both of what exists and of what does not exist, we must consult not science, but what Pascal calls our heart."[37] What is more,

> science herself consults her heart when she lays it down that the infinite ascertainment of fact and correction of false belief are the supreme goods for man. Challenge the statement, and science can only repeat it oracularly, or else prove it by showing that such

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[35] Ibid., 103.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

> ascertainment and correction bring man all sorts of other goods which man's heart in turn declares.[38]

The same applies in many cases even to evidence itself: "one's conviction that the evidence one goes by is of the real objective brand, is only one more subjective opinion added to the lot. For what a contradictory array of opinions have objective evidence and absolute certitude been claimed!"[39]

A comparable involvement of the subject in the life of reason can be observed in the way in which actual scientists and researchers go about their work, something, James points out, for which the principles of empiricism make allowance by looking to the consequences rather than to the origins of belief, for it is often not possible to segregate the exact role of the subject in the origin and sustaining of a particular line of inquiry. Actual practice in the process of inquiry involves personal dispositions towards intellectual possibilities which evidentially do not yet warrant such dispositions. The actual scientific researcher in the concrete situation is often "in love with some pet 'live hypothesis' of his own;"[40] the chemist sufficiently 'taken' with a particular hypothesis in many an

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 98.

[40] Ibid., 102.

instance that he is willing to act, to spend time exploring its viability.[41]

James nowhere denies that the world independent of the subject exerts a significant influence upon the formation of many convictions. As I will show in the next chapter, there is a pronounced and widely neglected realist vein in his epistemology. What he argues is that it is often not possible to isolate such extra-subjective influences entirely from other influences involving the subject and the community in a way which would satisfy Clifford's invocation of evidence per se. It is often not possible, that is, to isolate "intellectual insight,"--"*pure* reason"--from "wish and will" in the development of belief. "If any one should . . . assume that intellectual insight is what remains after wish and will and sentimental preference have taken wing, or that pure reason is what then settles our opinions, he would fly quite as directly in the teeth of the facts,"[42] and it is only with a view to such facts that realistic norms of responsible conduct in relation to certain existing beliefs or propensities to believe can be developed. The more closely one examines such facts, the more one is compelled to ask whether, notwithstanding the widely shared contention that "objective evidence and certitude are doubtless very fine ideals to play with . . .

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[41] Ibid., 90.

[42] Ibid., 93.

where on this moonlit and dream-visited planet are they found?"[43] While the "dispassionately judicial intellect . . . ought to be our ideal," James willingly concedes, it remains the case that the processes by which actual human beings concretely live out an intellectual relationship with the world at many levels make the establishment of conclusive evidential credentials for beliefs concerning complex matters very difficult.

Vivid testimony to this difficulty can be found in the exceedingly long history of manifest diversity and fallibility in philosophical inquiry, observes James, notwithstanding perennial appeals to evidence and sound argument. One finds evidentially and argumentatively developed cases both for and against the reasonableness of the world; the existence of a personal deity or of an extra-mental domain; the possibility of foundations for moral principles; the possibility of the world being eternal, of will being free, or of the universe being finite, as well as many political and moral positions, and even scientific ones as well. Apart from relations of ideas, one can in fact "find no proposition ever regarded by any one as evidently certain that has not either been called a falsehood, or at least had its truth sincerely questioned by some one else,"[44] invocations of evidence notwithstanding.

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[43] Ibid., 97.

[44] Ibid., 98.

Not only has inquiry generated conflicts of the foregoing sorts throughout history, so too has the quest even for criteria to adjudicate among such conflicts. Appeal to consensus, intuition, instinct, perception, logic, evidence, common sense, revelation and many others have all been seriously proposed and found wanting. In the end, "no concrete test of what is really true has ever been agreed upon."[45] The history of human inquiry amply illustrates that the "intellect, even with truth directly in its grasp, may have no infallible signal for knowing whether it be truth or no,"[46] and "in a world where we are so certain to incur . . . [errors] in spite of all our caution, a certain lightness of heart seems healthier than . . . [Clifford's] excessive nervousness on their behalf."[47]

Commentators have not only failed to do justice to the centrality in *The Will to Believe* of James's efforts to establish the complexity of the influences which together give rise to liveness, but they have also failed to recognize the congruence between this aspect of his essay and much work elsewhere in his corpus where he greatly broadens his account of such complexity. What *The Will to Believe* has to say about liveness and the complexity of the

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 99. See also 96 and 108.

[47] Ibid., 100.

intellectual life is only an abbreviated form of a position developed much more extensively throughout his writings. James inquires at great length and with considerable insight in a number of his works into the labyrinthine character of the intellectual life, and these inquiries have direct application to an appreciation of liveness and, as I will show later in the dissertation, to the ways in which the role of passional nature in *The Will to Believe* stands within the context of the complex unity of immediate experience which circumscribes its influence.

Regarding such complex unity, even individual terms, for example, James points out in the *Principles*, much less complex beliefs, do not stand alone but are "suffused" with the many nuances of meaning which they derive from the public language within which they stand, and the particular propositions in which they occur. Such propositions are themselves no less indebted to yet wider contexts involving an interdependence with other propositions whose influence they bear as "fringes,"[48] "haloes,"[49] and "suffusions,"[50] as it were. As James puts it on one occasion, "the present image shoots its perspective far before it"[51] in such a way

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[48] William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1950), I: 264. See also 271.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 269.

[51] Ibid., 256.

that acts of understanding rarely if ever possess a clearly definable conceptual limit, but involve a host of "unarticulated affinities"[52] among the elements which constitute them.

While one may say, then, that the "*intrinsically* important"[53] elements of discourse are the grammatically substantive ones--the "halting places" constituted by subjects and predicates--this formulation misses the "delicate idiosyncrasy"[54] of the intellectual life. That idiosyncrasy is a function of the complexity with which many relations together contribute to forming the full meaning of each assertion, "with every word fringed and the whole sentence bathed in that original halo of obscure relation, which, like a horizon, then spreads about its meaning."[55] The meaning of particular propositions is deeply implicated in such constellations of relations. "The same object is known everywhere, now from the point of view, if we may so call it, of this word, now from the point of view of that. And in our feeling of each word there chimes an echo or foretaste of every other."[56] One can envision a term as lying at the intersection of a variety of trajectories of

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[52] Ibid., 259.

[53] Ibid., 269.

[54] Ibid., 275.

[55] Ibid., 275-276.

[56] Ibid., 281.

meaning, like a mathematical point at the intersection of many lines. It can 'appear' differently depending upon perspective.[57] "The object of every thought," then, "is neither more nor less than *all* that the thought thinks, exactly as the thought thinks it, however complicated the matter" (italics mine).[58]

"However complicated the matter" is the main point here, returning to the central theme of *The Will to Believe*. Propositions are not isolated; their meaning and plausibility are a *contextual* phenomenon. They possess their liveness or deadness in virtue of occupying a particular location within a vast field of awareness which includes many interrelations, and such a 'field' view of awareness plays a major part in James's account of the sorts of insights which *The Varieties of Religious Experience* illustrates as underwriting much theistic belief.[59] Meaning and plausibility are highly context-dependent, a position richly articulated more recently in connection with theism by Iris Murdoch.[60]

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[57] Ibid., 282.

[58] Ibid., 276. See also James, *Collected Essays and Reviews* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), 379.

[59] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 190.

[60] Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London and New York: Ark Paperbacks, 1970).

An appreciation of such contextualization must also take into consideration the impact of volitional, social and historical influences as well, James rightly adds. As an individual, for example, I am able to choose to view my relations to elderly and demanding parents in light of their life-long efforts and sacrifices on my behalf, or in light of their faults and failures. How I *see* my moral obligations towards them, and how I act, will be deeply affected by such choices.

Such deliberations, however, are inseparable from the vast webs of convictions and sentiments involved in, say, the Japanese or American cultural context, and the history of such contexts, within which deliberation transpires.[61] Behind James's assertion in *The Will to Believe* that all thought is "funded" lies his recognition of this feature of the intellectual life, a recognition that in a great many matters, "*our fundamental ways of thinking about things are discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves*

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[61] It is important to emphasize James's rarely acknowledged insistence upon locating the individual's belief formation activities within a social context, as will become apparent in the following pages. *The Will to Believe*, says James, "treated the faith-attitude as a necessity for individuals, because the total 'evidence,' which only the race can draw, has to include their experiments among its data" (Letter of W. James to L. T. Hobhouse, Aug. 12, 1904, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 245). In a 1907 letter, James insisted again upon social considerations when dealing with the individual's belief formation processes (Letter of W. James to H. M. Kallen, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 249).

throughout the experience of all subsequent time. They form one great stage of equilibrium in the human mind's development, the stage of *common sense*."[62]

Such bodies of belief are assimilated by succeeding generations and become entrenched over time to the point of forming the bedrock of much that constitutes conventional thought. Conventional beliefs are "the dead heart of the living tree" with their own "paleontology;" they constitute a core "grown stiff with years of veteran service and petrified in mens' regard by sheer antiquity."[63] This petrification takes the form of some such beliefs seeming to be virtually self-evident, an impression so strong that in the case of some common conceptions, "we are now incapable of thinking naturally in any other terms."[64] It is important to note the connection between this point and James's suggestion in *The Will to Believe* that even in the case of some beliefs which appear to involve nothing but intellectual influences, there may nevertheless be other influences at work.

It is not just complexity which James is at pains to exhibit as characteristic of the intellectual field, however, but also a unity which permeates such complexity.

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[62] William James, *Pragmatism*, ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1981), 83-84.

[63] Ibid., 37.

[64] Ibid., 89.

The indebtedness of the intellectual life to such unity is revealed in a number of ways, not the least of which is the difficulty of introducing into current thought, contentions whose novelty threatens such unity. The introduction of radium into the conventional understanding of physics in the early twentieth century, for example, constituted a profound challenge to the status quo of that discipline,[65] as did the introduction of Descartes' geometric analyses in relation to those of Euclid.[66] These became live only slowly, as ongoing deliberation upon them clarified their relation to the intellectual status quo. Such new proposals had to acquit themselves successfully in relation to the overall coherence of existing thought, upon which thought depends for its intelligibility.

> We must *talk* consistently just as we must *think* consistently: for both in talk and thought we deal with kinds. Names are arbitrary, but once understood they must be kept to. We must not now call Abel 'Cain' or Cain 'Abel.' If we do, we ungear ourselves from the whole book of Genesis, and from all its connections with the universe of speech and fact down to the present time. We throw ourselves out of whatever truth that entire system of speech and fact may embody.[67]

Such coherence, James suggests, can be likened to the key in which music is composed, a key which runs through all the variations in a particular composition, or likened to the original architectural plan of a building which endures

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[65] Ibid., 36.

[66] Ibid., 84.

[67] Ibid., 102-103.

through additions and alterations of the structure: "you can make great changes but you cannot change a Gothic Church into a Doric temple."[68] This balance is not something which the subject is at liberty simply to ignore in the interests of personal benefit, for "the greatest enemy of any one of our truths may be the rest of our truths."[69]

Whether in *The Will to Believe*, the *Principles*, *Radical Empiricism* or elsewhere in James's corpus he returns repeatedly to the theme of the foregoing complex unity of the interrelation of many influences--personal, cultural, linguistic, and historical--in the intellectual life, and to this can also be added a number of considerations involved in his extensive attack upon associationism. Physiological influences, for example, play a crucial role in the varying capacities among people to discriminate, abstract, generalize, and to generate concepts, as distinct from simply utilizing already existing ones.[70] The mere repetitive presence of objects even to neurophysiologically developed knowers does not by itself account fully for the initial acquisition of the concepts of those objects. "*The manner in which we now become acquainted with complex*

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[68] Ibid., 83.

[69] Ibid., 43.

[70] See Chapter XIII of *Principles*.

objects need not in the least resemble the manner in which the original elements of our consciousness grew up."[71]

The ability to form a concept of an unfamiliar kind of animal, for instance, is a complex event in which a good many historical encounters with other animals, biting things, pets and so on are simultaneously at work. Given this history, I am as an adult "already in possession of categories for knowing each and all of its several attributes, and of a memory for retracing the order of their conjunction."[72] The original acquisition of these categories, however, is not so easily accounted for by such encounters with the world. Their original acquisition seems, rather, to involve in a central way fortuitous neurological developments which happily, although without our being able to fathom exactly how, have allowed for intellectual purchase upon the world. Religious concepts are implicated here as deeply as are biological, mathematical or other ones.

One must also take account of "secondary internal processes, which vary enormously from brain to brain, even though the brains be exposed to exactly the same 'outer relations.'"[73] Such "indirect causes of mental modifications," while not fully understood, are nonetheless

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[71] James, *Principles*, 2: 630.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 638.

reflected clearly in a wide variety of intellectual aptitudes.[74] One person, for example, may have a profound appreciation of music and another not; one may take to being at sea and another not; one may be gifted in the visual arts and another not.[75] The same applies to the distinctive aptitudes of individuals for humour, for poetry, or for mathematics, none of which abilities are unambiguously traceable to their possessors' direct experience of the world.[76]

The same influences can be felt in the area of ethics as well. While commending Mill for underscoring the indebtedness of many moral convictions to their association with pleasure, for example, James also points out that "it is surely impossible to explain all our [ethical] sentiments and preferences in this simple way."[77] Association between the imputation of goodness and the presence of pleasure or utility fails to account for many "secondary affections" which originate independently of such association. Some individuals--Dag Hammarskjöld in his work as Secretary General of the United Nations, for example--have possessed a particular aptitude for forming complex and profound moral

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[74] Ibid., 633.

[75] Ibid., 627.

[76] William James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," *Essays in Pragmatism*, ed. Alburey Castell (New York: Hafner Publishing Company), 67.

[77] Ibid.

judgements, while other individuals, such as the pacifist Tolstoy, have exhibited a novelty of moral insight which is not usually found among their contemporaries with whom they share a common disposition to the pleasurable.[78] *The Varieties of Religious Experience* presents copious evidence that there exist among many individuals analogous peculiar aptitudes having to do with religion. The conceptual results of such "inner forces"--"brain-born" neurological propensities, James calls them--"supervene upon experience" in such a way that they alter the character of other experiences of the world, however direct and concrete.

Permeating the intellectual field is also the influence of certain personal initiatives which are indispensable in the successful undertaking of intellectual inquiry, as James was seen to argue in *The Will to Believe*. Basic scientific contentions concerning, for example, the uniformity of nature are held "in spite of the most rebellious appearances; and our conviction of its truth is far more like a religious faith than like assent to a demonstration."[79] While one part of the body of experience as a whole supports the belief that there is consistency in the natural order--the infant learns to anticipate being fed when the nurse appears but not when the sibling appears--there also grows a contrary body of experience as well.

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[78] Ibid., 82.

[79] James, *Principles*, 2: 636-637.

"The order of scientific thought is quite incongruent either with the way in which reality exists or with the way in which it comes before us."[80] In many instances, events simply do not develop as anticipated. As Sigwart put it in his *Logic*:

> Whereas a part of these associations grows confirmed by frequent repetition, another part is destroyed by contradictory experience; and the world becomes divided for us into two provinces, one in which we are at home and anticipate with confidence always the same sequences; another filled with alternating, variable, accidental occurrences.[81]

So ambiguous is actual experience when taken in its entirety that it precludes any wholly empirical justification of belief in the uniformity of nature. "From the point of view of strict empiricism, nothing exists but the sum of particular perceptions with their coincidences on the one hand, their contradictions on the other."[82] Concrete experience gives direct access only to truths regarding "the proximate laws of nature, and habitudes of concrete things, that heat melts ice, that salt preserves meat, that fish die out of water, and the like."[83] Any inference from such limited convictions to an overarching assertion of the complete uniformity of nature as a whole cannot be defended empirically. It depends, on the

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[80] Ibid., 634.

[81] Ibid., 637.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

contrary, upon the personal choice to disregard significant segments of experience.

Taking the many foregoing considerations into account, the results of scientific investigation can be called the direct 'result of experience' only in a remote sense; they are "no more . . . inward *reproductions* of the outer order than the ethical and aesthetic relations are."[84] Rather, "the most persistent relations which science believes in are never matters of experience at all, but have to be disengaged from under experience by a process of elimination, that is, by ignoring conditions which are always present."[85] The compelling nature of scientific understanding is a function in significant part, it turns out, not only of a dispositional willingness to accept certain points of departure but also of the "*inward* thought-necessity" which belongs to the *a priori* ideal system of scientific concepts being brought to the world and applied selectively to it. Thus "the popular notion that 'Science' is forced on the mind *ab extra*, and that our interests have nothing to do with its constructions, is utterly absurd."[86] The *intermixture* of such "interests" and the influence of the world generates a scientific process which is actually remarkably roundabout. The scientific status quo at any one

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[84] Ibid., 639.

[85] Ibid., 636.

[86] Ibid., 667.

time represents the distillation of relatively few convictions from among a tremendously large number of others which have proven inadequate and so have been discarded.[87] "For one [scientific conception] that proves useful and applicable there are a thousand that perish through their worthlessness."[88]

The process of generating scientific hypotheses introduces yet a further element into the complexity of the life of reason, and the liveness of certain conceptions. The emergence of hypotheses, James points out, is very often "akin to that of the flashes of poetry and sallies of wit to which the instable brain-paths equally give rise."[89] Dickinson Miller was seen to take great exception to James's assigning of importance to such a peculiar flash of insight, an *aperçu* which resists adjudication by conventional methods of empirical inquiry. In the cases of Newton and Darwin, however, James observes, this seems to be precisely the sort of intellectual activity upon which much of the rest of their more mundane work was ultimately dependent. "The flash of similarity between an apple and the moon, between the rivalry for food in nature and the rivalry for man's selection, was too recondite to have occurred to any but

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[87] Ibid., 639-640.

[88] Ibid., 636.

[89] Ibid.

exceptional minds,"[90] and the peculiar ability to *see* such novel relations is a fundamental, albeit poorly understood element of rational behaviour.

How different the human being is from other animals in this respect, James recognized. Contrary to the stereotype that James's appeals to utility in epistemology led him to subordinate the intellectual life to what is familiar and personally desirable, what he in fact realized is that it is non-human animals whose experience is dominated by obvious relations. They are able quickly to learn, for example, to behave differently at the smell of a skunk and at the smell of fresh fruit, but they are also dominated by such predictable associations. Human beings, however, while exhibiting such behaviour, which James calls association "by contiguity" in order to designate the obvious nature of the associations recognized, are strikingly different in being able to identify relations in the midst of an apparent total lack of relation, and to build systems of understanding and belief upon such insights.[91]

The metaphorical ability to juxtapose apparently unrelated entities in such a way as to bring forth previously unrecognized relations among them is central to scientific, artistic, religious, poetic and all other forms

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[90] Ibid., 360.

[91] Ibid.

of thought. This centrality of metaphor does not diminish the importance of methodologically regulated forms of inquiry such as those of logical and scientific analysis, however, and James does not try to force a standoff on this count in *The Will to Believe* or elsewhere, in spite of his essay's periodic rhetorical criticisms of science and logic. Science, rather, is relocated by James among, rather than above, a wide range of intellectual activities, all of which are shown to capitalize upon the root human metaphorical capacity in different ways. James, in other words, "dislodges scientific explanations as paradigmatic for all explanations by showing that such explanation itself is a subset of the creative imposition of form."[92] Thus, "the ability to recognize unusual couplings, to discern relationships where no one has yet seen them, is the basis for both scientific and poetic genius."[93] It is also, Seigfried neglects to say, a central element of religious thought, as James points out in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Rule-governed procedures of thought rely and build upon this more basic capacity for insight, and the capacity to relate experienced entities creatively in keeping with such insight.

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[92] Charlene Seigfried, *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 161.

[93] Ibid., 165.

Few if any analysts of James have appreciated better than Charlene Seigfried James's redefinition of rationality in terms of the human metaphorical capacity. It is of the essence of James's epistemology, she has shown, that it looks to such metaphorical capacities in its effort to "combine the notion of careful and exact observation, which is characteristic of the natural sciences, with observation as romantic vision, the act of 'seeing into' as practised by Emerson, Tennyson, Whitman and his other favourite poets;"[94] to integrate "seeing as exactness, seeing as worthiness, and seeing as 'feeling with.'"[95]

> James's practice of sympathetic concrete observation brings together as a unified process 'seeing' and 'seeing into,' that is, seeing as scientific observation whose ideal is exactness and seeing as poetic transfiguration whose ideal is worthiness. The rare ability 'to seize fresh aspects in concrete things' is inextricably perceptive and inventive at the same time and characterizes the great scientist as well as the great artist.[96]

It is a pity that Seigfried's outstanding analysis of James in this respect is never brought to bear in detail upon his account of religiosity, for live theism, as James often shows in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, is rooted in great part in peculiar insights of a certain kind about which more will be said in Chapter 4.

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[94] Ibid., 139.

[95] Ibid., 169.

[96] Ibid., 167.

Further aspects of the third characteristic of liveness--the complex unity of the influences which together give rise to it--could be added to those so far set out, but that complexity is sufficiently clear by now. The liveness or deadness of particular propositions or belief systems has to do with an extraordinarily complex field of relations which involves extensive interdependence among an incalculable number of intertwining historical, cultural, linguistic, temperamental, neurological, volitional and other influences. Even the brief foregoing digression into this matter reveals a scene so complex that the prospect of trying introspectively to disentangle these innumerable threads in the pursuit of conclusive evidence in matters as complex as theism is at the very least extremely daunting, if not manifestly destined from the outset to failure.

These considerations should be kept prominently in mind in connection with James's contention in *The Will to Believe* that "the state of things" in the intellectual life is "far from simple;"[97] it is in fact very "mixed up." Therefore, "our next duty, having recognized this mixed-up state of affairs, is to ask whether it be simply reprehensible and pathological, or whether, on the contrary, we must treat it as a normal element in making up our minds."[98] As it turns out, the complex interplay of many

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[97] James, "Will to Believe," 95.

[98] Ibid.

diverse influences is in fact a "normal element" in the conduct of the life of reason. It is an element, however, which greatly complicates the nature of liveness, and the development of realistic norms of intellectually responsible behaviour towards live propositions. James's concern is to maintain such complexity clearly in view when developing norms of responsible intellectual behaviour in relation to certain existing beliefs or propensities to believe which, while they cannot be decisively vindicated evidentially at the moment, nevertheless possess a genuine albeit threatened intellectual plausibility for the subject.

It is important once again, in closing this chapter, to emphasize that it is existing beliefs or propensities to believe which concern James above all in *The Will to Believe*. He nowhere suggests, as has been widely contended, that we are entitled to create beliefs that are merely personally advantageous. On the contrary, as he says clearly in explicit connection with the will to believe doctrine, when our spontaneous intellectual propensities move in a contrary direction, "we cannot create a belief out of whole cloth."[99] Writing to Mark Baldwin, he decisively rejects any relation between his essay and "a man pretending to himself to believe what he does n't [sic] believe,"[100]

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[99] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 176.

[100] Letter of W. James to Mark Baldwin, 1899, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 243

or between the essay and beliefs embraced in wilful stubbornness. It is certain existing beliefs or propensities to believe which concern James, and he asks difficult and long neglected questions about Clifford's call for what would amount to an abandonment of such beliefs. Can we conclusively show, while keeping in mind the foregoing complexity of the intellectual life, that such abandonment necessarily serves the pursuit of truth as well as the avoidance of error? For that matter, does it even serve the avoidance of error, in the end? This cannot be shown, James holds. The complexity of the relationships among the influences which give rise to liveness makes the pursuit of objectivity in belief something much more complex than sweeping appeals to evidence per se, as I will show in the next chapter in defending James against charges of wishful thinking.

Chapter 3

WISHFUL THINKING CHARGES: THE SCOPE AND LIMIT OF THE SUBJECT'S INFLUENCE

The most common charge against *The Will to Believe* in the century since it was written has been the charge that it endorsed wishful thinking. Accusations in this vein seem to have been evoked above all by James' advocacy of the involvement of passional nature in the life of belief. It has been generally assumed that in the absence of clear evidential considerations, subjective states would enjoy a degree of autonomy in their influence upon belief which is conducive to wishful thinking, an influence which such states would not have if, as Clifford suggests, greater restraint were exercised in anticipation of better evidence.

I will argue in this chapter that within the terms of reference of James's account of the intellectual life, subjective influences do not enjoy the degree of autonomy imputed to them by James's critics, and that the longstanding charges of wishful thinking should be reassessed with a view to this fact. It is commentators, not James, who have compartmentalized the life of reason in a way which isolates the many influences actually involved

in it from one another, and it is those commentators, therefore, not James, who have laid the groundwork for an isolation of subjective influences which leads to the charges of wishful thinking. James himself depicted subjective states as framed in and limited in their influence in the long run by their interrelations within the complex unity of immediate experience. They are also framed in by their interrelations with the many different kinds of consequences which actually flow from particular beliefs.

Not all commentators have been equally remiss in neglecting the contextual setting of James's recourse to passional nature. Gerald Myers, for example, has been something of an exception in this respect, having recognized that, for James, subjective influences do not stand alone; they "exist as they do because something in reality harmonizes with them."[1] Notwithstanding his recognition of this aspect of James's position, however, even Myers eventually goes on to sever such states from the larger setting which he has indicated is provided for them by James, and proceeds thereupon to criticize James for having sponsored wishful thinking. I will return later to a closer consideration of Myers' position.

It is John J. McDermott who stands apart prominently in having recognized not only that there is a restrictive context within which subjective states exert their

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[1] Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought*, 461.

influence, but that James's assigning of epistemological significance to such states is limited in important ways by that context. While recognizing, with Myers and most others, that "the active relationship between 'congeniality' as a character of the real, and the 'powers' of men, is a central insight in the thought of James," McDermott rightly adds that

> although he [James] sees truth as a function of "interest," this position does not encourage predatory action, for the dialectic between man's "powers" and the "congeniality" of nature is always framed out within the demanding context of empirically given relationships. Further, this interaction leads James . . . constantly to set all human activity into the wider process of "seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos."[2]

Only when this aspect of James's thought is clarified do the weaknesses of the longstanding charges of wishful thinking make themselves apparent, and so it is to such clarification that I now turn.

James is best known for his efforts a century ago to integrate human purpose, intention, sentiment, and so on, into epistemology. On James's account, experience is much indebted to our organizational initiatives,[3] and his work in this respect, especially *The Will to Believe*, has aroused widespread concern, as I indicated in Chapter 1. Many

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[2] McDermott, *The Writings of William James*, xxix.

[3] Charlene Seigfried, *Chaos and Context: A Study in William James* (Athens Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978), 112.

philosophers have recoiled, and continue to recoil, from what they have seen in James's work as "a universe with such as *us* contributing to create its truth, a world delivered to *our* opportunism and *our* private judgements."[4] Such a world has seemed to them disconcertingly to be, as James once put it, "a trunk without a tag, a dog without a collar,"[5] an open-ended event which is not so much for humans to replicate reliably in an intellectual mirror, as it is something to interpret in ways which seem uncomfortably susceptible to self-service. The prominence of this aspect of James's work has often evoked the sorts of negative response which more recently can be found among some critics of Richard Rorty.

Rorty and others of like mind have contributed a good deal to encouraging a wider recognition of the depth of the involvement of the subject and her community in doxastic practice. If James had been merely a precursor of such developments, he would now be of largely historical interest only. He was much more than such a precursor, however. His efforts in fact were not devoted primarily to an amplification of the role of the subject in the formation of belief, I would argue, but to challenging the legitimacy of a point of departure for epistemology in *either* the subject or the world. It is the subject *and* the world which

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[4] James, *Pragmatism*, 125.

[5] Ibid.

together constitute the proper starting point for epistemology, he argued above all over the course of his career, whether in his earlier accounts of the river or stream of experience,[6] or in his later work, in Radical Empiricism, on immediate experience. In the most basic form of experience, he held, the many influences involved in the intellectual life, which I have illustrated in the previous chapter, make themselves felt *together*, and while the elements of this unity can be subject to retrospective, reflective disassembly, the results of such disassembly are destined ultimately to be reincorporated eventually back into the unity of immediate experience where they will once again exercise a mutually limiting influence upon one another. In that state they will once again be put to the test by their congruence or incongruence with each other within the unity of experience as a whole, including the "demanding context of empirically given relationships," as McDermott was seen above to have put it. It is James's account of immediate experience, in other words, which is a major part of the context within which, in *The Will to Believe* and elsewhere, he commends the influence of passional nature in doxastic practice, and it is the persistent neglect of that context which has for decades fuelled charges of wishful thinking, charges which have thrived upon the decontextualization of passional nature.

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[6] James, *Principles*, 1: 239

A recognition that James was not concerned exclusively with amplifying the role of the subject in doxastic practice ought to have been triggered more widely in this century by the prominent realist current which runs throughout his work. As late as 1907 he emphasized in an interview in the *New York Times*, for example, that while pragmatism is distinctive in the emphasis which its adherents give to action, "nothing could be more ludicrous than to call this their primary interest."[7] On the contrary, speaking in a way distinctly suggestive of a commensurateness between thought and its object which is more typical of correspondence theory than of common stereotypes of pragmatism, he claimed that

> pragmatism's primary interest is in its doctrine of truth. All pragmatist writers make this the centre of their speculations; not one of them is sceptical, not one doubts our ultimate ability to penetrate theoretically in to the very core of reality.[8]

He refers to himself in *Essays on Radical Empiricism* as a "natural realist,"[9] and had claimed earlier in *Pragmatism* that "our true ideas of sensible things do indeed copy them.

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[7] William James, "Interview in [The] New York Times, 1907," McDermott, *The Writings of William James*, 448.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Madden, Chakrabarti, Meyers and numerous others agree in designating James as a "naive" or "natural" realist. See Edward Madden and Chandana Chakrabarti, "James' 'Pure Experience' versus Ayer's 'Weak Phenomenalism,'" *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 12 (Winter, 1976), 5, 10. See also Meyers, "Roots," 86.

Shut your eyes and think of yonder clock on the wall, and you get just such a true picture or copy of its dial."[10] Such copying is "primarily" a matter of "agreement,"[11] and in what he refers to as a pivotal aspect of his position he accepts definitions of truth and falsity which depict them as having to do with relations of agreement or disagreement which "obtain between an idea . . . and its object.[12] The truth of conceptions, he says, "means their 'agreement,' as falsity means their disagreement, with 'reality.'"[13] In "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" he says that "truth supposes a standard outside of the thinker to which he must conform,"[14] and responding to critics of himself and of Dewey and Schiller, he insists that "all three absolutely agree in admitting the transcendency of the object (provided it be an experienceable object) to the subject, in the truth-relation."[15] Dewey, he adds, "holds as firmly as I do to objects independent of our judgements."

James even accepts the possibility of a proposition being absolutely true: "On the one hand will stand reality,

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[10] James, *Pragmatism*, 96.

[11] Ibid., 102.

[12] William James, *The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1975), 3.

[13] Ibid. See also James, *Pragmatism*, 96.

[14] James, "Moral Philosopher," 70.

[15] James, *The Meaning of Truth*, 9.

on the other an account of it which proves impossible to better or to alter. If the impossibility prove permanent, the truth of the account will be absolute."[16] Such a state is "that ideal vanishing-point towards which we imagine that all our temporary truths will some day converge."[17] There is no evidence to suggest that James viewed such a vanishing point as a useful fiction, a carrot at the end of the philosophical stick to keep the process of truth-seeking from becoming exhausted by its own interminability. "Truth with a big T, and in the singular" in pragmatism's conception of it, he says clearly, "claims abstractly to be recognized."[18]

One finds language throughout James's corpus to the effect that "all our truths are beliefs about 'Reality,' and in any particular belief the reality acts as something independent, as a thing *found*, not manufactured."[19] It is found partly through perception, through the "flux of sensations which are forced upon us, coming we known not whence. Over their nature, order and quantity we have as good as no control."[20] What is given in them is a "reality 'independent' of human thinking." Such a given can be

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[16] James, *Pragmatism*, 120.

[17] Ibid., 106-107.

[18] Ibid., 111.

[19] Ibid., 117.

[20] Ibid.

"felt," often with great force, in the concrete contact with physical objects, or even, in a less sensory vein, according to James's ethical writings, in the historical experience of different moral relationships among human beings.[21] In the face of such a given, many intellectual possibilities will be "decisively rebuked."[22]

There has been much controversy regarding the notion of a given, as James acknowledged long before more recent work by Sellars and others in this area. Schiller and Dewey, he observes for example, understand it "as a limit."[23] Others, such as scholastics, understand it under the category of substance. Yet others "may think to get at it in its independent nature, by peeling off the successive man-made wrappings."[24] Henri Bergson and like minds "bravely try to define"[25] it, while others "say there is no core, the finally completed wrapping being reality and truth in one," a position with which James is clearly uncomfortable.[26]

James himself is typically open in principle to this range of options. The one which is in fact correct, he

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[21] James, "Moral Philosopher," 81.

[22] James, *Pragmatism*, 117.

[23] Ibid., 120.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 129.

[26] Ibid., 120.

says, will eventually carry the day. His own position in the interim, however, is clear. There is, he says, "a non-human element" which one can "know."[27] Such knowledge, however, is not direct. The given which informs experience is only ever encountered in an "*imagined* aboriginal presence" (italics mine); something that "we may glimpse . . . but . . . never grasp"[28] apart from its employment, and the success or failure to which such employment give rise in concrete relationships with the world. What is invented allows for a recognition of what is not invented, some aspect of the world itself which has actually been present all along but has gone unrecognized. "The abrupt transitions in Shakespeare's thought astonish the reader by their unexpectedness no less than they delight him by their fitness."[29]

There is throughout James's corpus, then, a clear realist strand which ought long ago to have raised a more widespread serious questioning of subjectivistic stereotypes of James's position, stereotypes which, unfortunately continue to this day to be propagated widely.[30] For James,

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[27] Ibid., 117.

[28] Ibid., 119.

[29] James, *Principles*, 2: 362.

[30] "The Pragmatic Theory is a form of cognitive relativism, denying any objective, interest-independent reality, as the proponents of the Correspondence Theory and the Coherence Theory would maintain" (Louis Pojman, *What Can We Know: An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*

> there is something in every experience that escapes our arbitrary control. If it be sensible experience it coerces our attention; if a sequence, we cannot invert it; if we compare two terms we can come to only one result. There is a push, an urgency, within our very experience, against which we are on the whole powerless, and which drives us in a direction that is the destiny of our belief.[31]

There is, in other words, a widely encountered recalcitrance in experience, notwithstanding the affective and intellectually creative forces which may be brought to bear in an effort to shape experience in often self-interested ways. For James, "reason is not the original architect of the world in which we live. There is a prior world of existence with which we are directly acquainted. Reason may take over this foundation, reform it, and build upon it. But in order to do this effectively, it must first accept it, and understand it as it is."[32] Facts, in other words, "are the bounds of human knowledge, set for it, not by it."

Even Bertrand Russell acknowledged the invocation by James of "a basis of 'fact' for . . . creative activity to work upon."[33] He did not pursue the point vigorously enough, however. Had he done so, he would have better appreciated James's unification of the conceptually inventive 'building upon' what is found in the world and the

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[Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995], 327).

[31] James, *The Meaning of Truth*, 45.

[32] Wild, *Radical Empiricism*, 204.

[33] Russell, *Philosophical Essays*, 141.

'finding' which such building upon involves. These two activities stand in a mutually limiting tension from which neither can break entirely free. This tension is an important part of Radical Empiricism's account of immediate experience and provides a context within which passional nature is not at liberty to exert its influence unimpeded. The relationship between subject and world involves a "*double* intentionality,"[34] as Wild has called it. The self, that is, "not only projects intentional meanings towards others, but also receives them from others and responds to them."[35] While it is true, in other words, that we "humanly make an addition to . . . sensible reality," it is no less the case that "that reality tolerates the addition"[36] in some cases and not in others. Certain additions, in this sense, "'agree' with the reality; they fit it, while they build it out."[37] While we are at liberty to build out an understanding of the world, a trunk without a tag is not a horse, and a dog without a collar is not a tree. The world will not "tolerate" the application of certain renderings of it, to use James's language. The "blooming buzzing confusion" that is the world is not the unmitigated chaos which citations of that famous phrase seem

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[34] Wild, *Radical Empiricism*, 384.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

most often invoked to convey. The world independent of the knower, rather, "has germs of meaning in it, which may be developed and amplified."[38]

This reciprocity of influence between world and knower allows for an ongoing process in which "by a new use of language and concepts, working in cooperation with sense and feeling . . . [the experiencer] will try to *find and to create* meanings that will clarify and do justice to the facts" (italics mine).[39] While experience, for James, then, "is not independent of our activity,"[40] as Seigfried has put it in her extensive inquiries into this aspect of James's thought, it nevertheless "includes both something given and something taken."[41] As Edie has said, "James is not an empirio-criticist but an *intuitionist* and what is *given* in intuitive experience is the *real* world."[42]

The foregoing relationship which James intended be understood as existing between the creative contribution to experience by the subject, and the contribution by the world, has often been construed in a phenomenalistic vein which misleadingly separates the aboriginal occurrence of contact with the world from the conceptual organization of

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[38] Ibid., 406.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Seigfried, *Chaos and Context*, 112.

[41] *Ibid*.

[42] Edie, *William James and Phenomenology*, 70.

that contact, and so sees that relationship as involving the superimposition of a conceptual system upon a more basic, primitive non-conceptual contact with the world.[43] It is true that, for James, many concepts are brought to bear

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[43] Meyers stands apart among recent participants in discussion of James's work in this connection in arguing that the phenomenalist is not committed to an atomistic view of sensory experience which must be augmented by an account of the constructive or interpretive activity of the knower. Rather, phenomenalists differ, according to Meyers, in their views of the degree of unity which exists among sense data as given, and so phenomenalists can be understood as falling into both realist and idealist camps. On this basis, Meyers argues that the viability of Ayer's interpretation of James as a strong phenomenalist, for example, has not yet been settled. James's realism can be acknowledged, he thinks, within the terms of reference of a phenomenalistic interpretation of James's overall epistemology. Madden, by contrast, argues that phenomenalism is inherently and necessarily atomistic in its understanding of sense data, and is thus forced to be either constructivist or interpretive in its understanding of the ways in which such atomistic sense data come to be unified in the experience of objects. On most accounts, however, the strong phenomenalist position is representative and constructivist in a way that James's position is not. In strong phenomenalism, a dualism of knower and object is overcome by the relation between the representational construction of sense data and the corresponding object. "The epistemic problem is to bridge the gulf between physical objects conceived as 'theoretical constructs' and their evidential base [consisting of the particulars of sense experience]" (Madden and Chakrabarti, "Pure Experience," 13). In James's position on immediate experience, "there is no 'gap'" in the first place" (Ibid., 8). A dualism of act and object is a retrospective, not an introspective phenomenon. The given, for James, then, "is much wider in scope than for sense-data philosophers and phenomenalists, including not only patches of colour, odours, tastes, etc., but also the entire physical object itself," as well as relations existing among objects. (See A. J. Ayer, *The Origins of Pragmatism* [San Francisco: Freeman, Cooper and Company, 1968]. See also Peter H. Hare, and Chandana Chakrabarti, "The Development of William James's Epistemological Realism," Maurice Wohlgelernter, ed., *History, Religion, and Spiritual Democracy* [New York: Columbia, 1980], 238).

retrospectively upon the flow of immediate experience. A phenomenalistic understanding of James which understands the relationship between immediate experience and the conceptual domain entirely in such terms, however, misses one of the most important aspects of his account. That aspect is the *inseparability*, in immediate experience, of contact with the world, and the organization of such contact. Immediate experience is not simply a *non-conceptual phenomenon* upon which concepts and intentions are imposed; it is a conceptually *in-formed* encounter with the world. Concepts function *within* immediate experience as well as through a retrospective reflection upon it. "Pure experience was intended to include concepts as well as percepts,"[44] Myers has accurately pointed out. In such experience there is a unity of "space, time, conjunctive relations, change, activity . . . conceiving, imagining, and remembering,"[45] sensory influences, and much else.

Hume's impressions and ideas, then, may be the most basic building blocks of experience *as reflected upon*, but, James cautions, if in a rigorously empirical manner we begin our analysis of experience by retrospectively examining the form in which it actually occurs,[46] such impressions and ideas reveal themselves to be abstractions of fuller

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[44] Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought*, 314.

[45] Ibid., 314.

[46] James, *Principles*, I: 224.

experiences which are yet more basic, experiences in which relations, intentions, concepts, dispositions, and so forth are aboriginally and seamlessly interwoven. The most aboriginal level of experience is such pure experience in its immediacy, and such experience is not compartmentalized but is a unity of many elements which make themselves felt simultaneously, and exercise a mutually limiting influence in relation to one another.[47]

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[47] The marginalia of James's library holdings indicate that the atomism of Hume's position much concerned him. (A. A. Roback, *William James: His Marginalia, Personality and Contribution* [Cambridge Mass., Sci-Art Publishers, 1942], 47. See David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, appendix to Bk. I, pp. 559-560, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 1: 568-569). It is also notable that T. H. Green's 299 page introduction to the first volume of James's copy of the *Treatise*--which, Perry points out, makes much of the inadequacy of Hume's philosophy on the matter of relations--seems to have been the object of even closer attention by James than the overall text of the *Treatise* itself (Perry, *Thought and Character*, 1: 551). Hume's atomism had been the red herring, thought James, which had drawn modern critical philosophy off the scent of sound epistemology. Such atomism lies behind the inadequacies of Hume's position on substance (James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism and A Pluralistic Universe* [New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942], 42; *Some Problems of Philosophy* [Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1979], 66; Daniel W. Bjork, *William James: The Centre of His Vision* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1988], 43-44), self (James, *Collected Essays and Reviews*, 435; *Pragmatism*, 69); and causality (James, *Collected Essays and Reviews*, 435). Hume's positions on these subjects are deeply indebted to his inability to find the origins of relations in something other than the synthetic activities of mind. This a function of Hume's neglect of immediate experience (James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 44). Immediate experience is not fully and accurately represented by abstract reflection upon it, for a crucial shift takes place in the character of immediate experience when it becomes the object of reflection. In its most primitive form, as I will explore more fully below, experience is not constituted by discreet fragments of mental life which must be

One of the corollaries of James's account of immediate experience is that it cannot be made an object of direct, introspective analysis. While one can retrospectively structure previous occurrences of immediate experience, immediate experience in its immediacy and unity cannot be made an object of analytic reflection. The various stages of lighting a match, for example--scraping it against the side of the box, hearing the hiss of the combustion, holding it at a distance while it flares--can be identified as distinguishable stages of a process only in retrospect; the actual event as an occurrence within the overall flow of experience has no such stages. In a letter to Maxwell Savage in 1910, James emphasized his indebtedness to Bergson's thought on this matter, to Bergson's illustration, that is, of the extent to which "antinomies

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inferentially or in some other way phenomenalistically 'bundled' together. Rather, relations, as much as relata, are given. Critical philosophy is distracted from this by Hume's philosophical atomism, his recurrent tendency "to do away with the connections of things, and to insist most on the disjunctions," (Ibid., 43) and his contention that "'all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and . . . the mind never perceives any real connection among distinct existences'" (Ibid., 103). Such an approach to experience, while sometimes useful, (James, *Principles*, 1: 236) nevertheless "entirely misrepresents the natural appearances" (Ibid., 237). Regarding Kant and critical philosophy in this respect see Henry James, ed., *The Letters of William James*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), 2: 179; Frederick J. Down Scott, ed., *William James: Selected Unpublished Correspondence 1885-1910* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986), 251.

and puzzles all come from a misapplication of concepts to the immediate flow of sensible experience."[48]

Recognizing the elusiveness of immediate experience to direct introspective reflection, Charlene Seigfried has aptly characterized the notion of immediate experience as a "limit-concept,"[49] by which she means an "explanatory hypothesis which can be postulated but not experienced as such." That is, immediate experience "is never immediately experienced and communicated as such because as soon as anyone is conscious in a human sense, he has already structured that consciousness according to conceptual and verbal categories."[50] To say that immediate experience is a postulate, a limit concept, is not to deny that it is directly felt in its actual occurrence. It is to say that what is felt in this way cannot be subject to introspective scrutiny and analysis; such analysis is always retrospective. It is in this respect that it transcends the conceptualization and analysis of it. The basic immediate relation between the subject and the world, then, is an "unanalyzable relation," and here the complex unity of intellectual and non-intellectual components of experience, which I endeavoured to illustrate in the last chapter,

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[48] Scott, *Correspondence*, 533. As I will indicate below, James's convictions in this respect long predated his exposure to Bergson.

[49] Seigfried, *Chaos and Context*, 51.

[50] Ibid.

reveals itself with particular force. Passional nature is only one of many elements of such a unity.

James's earlier efforts to develop an account of immediate experience which would preserve the double intentionality of the relation between subject and world without lapsing into a problematic dualism of given and concept continued in his later works. He wanted to "retain the commonsense belief in ordinary realities (trees, human bodies) while metaphysically analyzing those realities such that their apparent boundaries disappear into the fluid continuity"[51] of actual experience. For James, however, "boundaries meant chasms, breaks, and interruptions . . . When things are identified by boundaries, they are entities, objects, or substances that involve discontinuity,"[52] and such discontinuity needed, he thought, to be reconciled with the seamless continuity which characterizes the actual flow of immediate experience. He therefore attempted to accommodate, within the continuity of immediate experience, what he thought of as its distinctive "drops" or "steps" or "pulses." While his efforts to do this sometimes had a Berkeleyan flavour, he was not really Berkeleyan in his account of what actually constitutes "the nature of the realities that exist beyond any experience. He was not

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[51] Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought*, 322-323.

[52] Ibid., 322.

prepared to follow Berkeley in preserving their existence through a godly percipient, nor was he satisfied to call them permanent possibilities of perception, as Mill did."[53]

His position remained incomplete at the time of his death, and how in particular the inclusion of concepts within immediate experience is possible, Myers, for example, has concluded, "remains a puzzle in the Jamesian metaphysis."[54] It is a matter, however, with which James continued to struggle throughout his later works. In his analysis of the relation between percept and concept in *Some Problems of Philosophy*, for instance, the interdependence of the two, notwithstanding the distinctive contribution by each to experience, is unmistakeable. Concepts and percepts,

> are made of the same kind of stuff, and melt into each other when we handle them together. How could it be otherwise when the concepts are like evaporations out of the bosom of perception, into which they condense again whenever practical service summons them? No one can tell, of the things he now holds in his hand and reads, how much comes in through his eyes and fingers, and how much, from his apperceiving intellect, unites with that and makes of it this particular 'book.' The universal and the particular parts of the experience are literally immersed in each other, and both are indispensable. Conception is not like a painted hook, on which no real chain can be hung; for we hang concepts upon percepts, and percepts upon concepts interchangeably and indefinitely; and the relation of the two is much more like what we find in those cylindrical 'panoramas' in

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[53] Ibid., 333.

[54] Ibid., 314.

> which a painted background continues a real foreground so cunningly that one fails to detect the joint.[55]

While we are able to some degree upon introspection to disentangle the two, it remains the case overall that they

> play into each other's hands. Perception awakens thought, and thought in turn enriches perception. The more we see, the more we think; while the more we think, the more we see in our immediate experiences, and the greater grows the detail, and the more significant the articulateness of our perception.[56]

James's progress in developing an account of immediate experience prior to his death can be best appreciated by considering its indebtedness to one particular image. As Myers has pointed out, many major advances in the history of philosophy have involved a thinker being initially seized by a *picture* which so captivates the imagination that subsequent analyses become devoted to working out in detail the theoretical potential of such a picture. The picture which was deeply involved in James's struggle to develop an account of immediate experience was the picture of a mosaic. In James's case it might be more appropriate to speak about such a picture in terms of metaphor, in keeping with the centrality of metaphor in his understanding of rationality.

The quest for theory is rooted in an often fortuitous, insightful aperçu, in James's account, in which one relates formerly unrelated elements of experience, and

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[55] James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, 58.

[56] Ibid, 59. See also 31, 34, 56.

then undertakes an exploration of the susceptibility of such a relation to being developed fruitfully into theory, and thereupon being supported empirically. As Charlene Seigfried was seen previously to have put it, James sought to "combine the notion of careful and exact observation, which is characteristic of the natural sciences, with observation as romantic vision, the act of 'seeing into' as practised by Emerson, Tennyson, Whitman and his other favourite poets."[57] For James, in other words, "the rare ability 'to seize fresh aspects in concrete things' is inextricably perceptive and inventive at the same time and characterizes the great scientist as well as the great artist."[58]

James's attention was seized so powerfully by the potential of a metaphorical juxtaposition of the field of awareness with a mosaic work of art that his pursuit of a coherent theory of immediate experience was extensively guided by that metaphor. It is one thing to come into possession of such a metaphorical aperçu, however, but it is altogether another to discover whether it can provide the basis for the development of a viable philosophical theory. That process of development takes much time and experiment, as was the case with James's attempt to develop the mosaic

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[57] Seigfried, *Reconstruction*, 139.

[58] Ibid., 167.

metaphor of immediate experience into a theoretical account of such experience.

It is true, as many have observed, that James's thought about immediate experience changed in his later work. Emphasizing his philosophical kinship with Bergson, he sometimes seems in his later works to have increasingly amplified the distorting effect of conceptualization. This "newly aggressive radical empiricism"[59] was subject to criticism in this respect by Dickinson Miller and Arthur Lovejoy, among others, as too indiscriminate in its attack upon conceptualization. "Miller seems to have been quite fair in his suggestion that James should have confined his protest to those concepts that imply that there is more discreteness and lack of movement in the perceptually given than is actually to be found there."[60]

Myers' judgement of James's later work on the unity of immediate experience is more deeply critical, notwithstanding Myers' keen appreciation of and sympathy for James's aims. James backed himself into what Myers considers to have been an untenable position in a way which can be best illustrated by invoking the basic metaphor of the mosaic. Unlike the mosaic piece of art, the pieces of the mosaic of immediate experience, as James envisioned it, are related not as discrete entities cemented into a common

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[59] Hare, "Introduction," xxxviii.

[60] Ibid., xxxviii.

bedding but are related at their "edges" by their relations with other elements of the field of experience. Setting aside problems involved in connection with James's having held that the relations among the parts of the experiential field may themselves be discrete objects of experience, we can turn our attention to the way in which the problem of immediate experience presented itself to James within such relational terms of reference.

In an attempt to better accommodate the individuality and recalcitrance of some aspects of immediate experience without undermining the seamlessness of such experience as a whole, James developed his mosaic image in a way which portrayed the elements of such experience as overlapping so that they could be thought of as merging into one another in a borderless fashion, as it were, without entirely forfeiting their autonomy. One might in this connection envision a watercolour painting in which the various colours, while distinct, have been allowed to flow into each other so that there are no clearly definable lines of demarcation among them. Myers effectively characterizes both the metaphysical and epistemological aspects of such a position in describing James as having held that

> contiguity, adjacency, or what he often referred to as nextness is a datum for direct apprehension which can be assumed to exist throughout the universe such that any given experience or thing is connected by a series of contiguous intermediaries to any other experience or thing. The universe is not merely a disconnected assemblage of processes but is rather a concatenation or mosaic of pluralistic items. It has the continuity of

> nextness between things, which yields a degree of unity. . . We can view the plural realities as accessible to each other by connecting paths, flowings of the sort that we know in our own streams of consciousness.[61]

For Myers, however, among the obstacles which lay in the path of developing a theory along such lines was the contention, which James had proposed in his early thought, that mental states can not be compounded. The identity of a particular mental state, for James, lay "in its indivisible unity or . . . unanalyzable awareness."[62] A development of the mosaic image which, in the interests of doing justice to the unity of immediate experience, would involve the "inclusion of one mental state within another in a successive series,"[63] would seem to require the compounding of mental states. A discrete aspect of experience, however, could not be seen as "overlapping" with, and thence becoming sufficiently part of another--in order the sustain the continuity of experience--without such being-a-part-of compromising the indivisibility and autonomy of the units involved. "A unit cannot be indivisible and at the same time include another unit, nor can it owe its identity simultaneously to being indivisible and to being part of a

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[61] Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought*, 326.

[62] Ibid., 338.

[63] Ibid., 335.

larger unit. These contradictions resulted from the admission that mental states can include each other."[64]

The die was cast with respect to immediate experience, in Myers' judgement, by James's concession of the compounding of mental states.

> James believed that nothing remained but to surrender any further attempts to talk coherently about the identity of the mental states that constitute the flow of pure experience. To abandon the original idea that mental states are units would have denied James the means of identifying any mental state. Without their nature as units, James thought, mental states are virtually indistinguishable, and we have lost the logic of identity.[65]

In Myers' view, then, James ultimately came to see himself as being forced into the adoption of an irrationalism.

> When everything is reduced to a phase of the flux of pure experience, as in the Jamesian pluralistic universe, then things have a very slippery identity indeed. Sounding somewhat like Hegel, he remarked in *A Pluralistic Universe*: "It is that there is a sense in which real things are not merely their own selves, but they may vaguely be treated as also their own others, and that ordinary logic, since it denies this, must be overcome."[66]

Myers acknowledges the efforts of some commentators to anticipate how James's position might have been developed in an less irrationalist direction if he had lived longer. Myers gives a sympathetic hearing, for example, to Perry's suggestion that James might well have developed a view

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[64] Ibid., 338.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., 337.

according to which the elements which stand out within the flow of experience could be characterized as

> ephemeral specious presents [which] are the basic units of our experience and can be thought of as phases or pulses that retain at least a momentary identity before being changed by the experiential flux of which they are a part. Continuity results if these minimal pulses of reality are considered the finite components of growing processes . . .[67]

The problems occasioned by James's later decision to allow for the compounding of states of consciousness, however, in Myers' judgement, made it "impossible to follow Perry's recipe for dissolving the dilemma."[68] In the end, "the pure experience concept did not permit clear distinction between the objective and subjective dimensions

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[67] Ibid., 330. Perry offers the following assessment. James, he says, if he had lived longer:

> would have described a sequence of happenings in which events occur like strokes or pulses, with a thrust of their own; but in which they would at the same time be continuous--in the sense of conjunction of nextness, rather than in the sense of connection. Their continuity would not consist in the link between them, but in the *absence* of any such intermediary. Being thus in direct contact, they would be subject to 'osmosis.' Event *a* would look forward to, and in some measure anticipate, *b*; *b*, when it came, would in some measure fulfil this anticipation, and look back upon *a*. The prospect of *a*, and the retrospect of *b*, would overlap; *a* would be qualified by *b*-about-to-come, and *b* by *a*-just-past. This would not contradict the discrete order of dynamic beats or initiatives: they would begin apart, and run together. Nor would the progressive character of the change contradict the requirements of freedom. Each event would come as an unfolding, as something 'called-for,' or 'looked-for,' but would also have in it an element of surprise. (Perry, *Thought and Character*, II: 666).

[68] Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought*, 337.

of a conscious state."[69] James's efforts to impute objectivity and subjectivity to a more fundamental phenomenon--pure experience--did not work out.

> This Jamesian contention only confuses us because we can never find an *it* that is sometimes a stable pen and at other times an instable awareness of a pen. . . It is questionable whether a world in which mental and physical things abruptly exchange identities is intelligible, but such a world clearly cannot be used for explaining the world we experience.[70]

There certainly is textual support for Myers' criticisms. "I went through the inner catastrophe," James himself admits with respect to his work on immediate experience. "I was bankrupt intellectually, and had to change my base. . . If any of you try sincerely and pertinaciously on your own separate accounts to intellectualize reality, you may be similarly driven to a change of front."[71] He abandoned the notion that states of consciousness cannot be compounded, as I indicated above;[72] he amplified his allegiance to Bergson; he underscored the degree to which the apparently discrete aspects of

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[69] Ibid., 337.

[70] Ibid., 310.

[71] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, 291-2.

[72] Ibid., 286.

experience are "their own others,"[73] and he widened the gap between pure experience and conceptualization.[74]

On the other hand, however, even in his late work James claims that the religiosity of his mature humanism is "susceptible of a reasoned defense,"[75] a position which certainly seems to be at odds with an irrationalism, and with the fideistic religiosity which would appear to be an unavoidable corollary of such irrationalism. He anticipated Myers' objection that we cannot reflectively isolate an 'it' which counts twice over as subjective and objective, responding forthrightly that "there is no *general* stuff of which experience at large is made.[76] The objective and subjective modes of appearance are *events* involved in actual commerce with the world. "Knowledge of sensible realities . . . comes to life inside the tissue of experience. It is *made*; and made by relations that unroll themselves in time.[77]

There is much in James's later work on immediate experience, moreover, to suggest that he did not intend to give up on the double intentionality of his earlier thought

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[73] Ibid., 282; 284, 287. See also *Some Problems of Philosophy*, 49.

[74] James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, 54, 55, 59, 61. See also *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 145.

[75] James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 194

[76] Ibid., 26.

[77] Ibid., 57; 75.

in favour of an irrationalistic abandonment of conceptualization, but intended rather to develop his earlier position more deeply. When he recalls, as seen above for example, that he had been compelled eventually to "change base" with respect to conceptualization, he adds that this had been a movement away from attempts to "intellectualize reality,"[78] and there is much in his attacks upon rationalism in related texts which suggests that what he was resisting was the wholesale imperviousness, in the intellectualizing propensities of many rationalists, to the vagaries of the particular--to the ever reappearing "novelty" which James congratulates Peirce for having emphasized.[79] Moreover, when he commends the Heraclitean element of Bergson's thought, he does so with the provision that Bergson's repudiation of logic is a repudiation of the notion that "in the actual world the logical axioms hold good *without qualification*" (italics mine).[80] What is more, as Hare has pointed out, James's later work moves in an irrationalist and fideistic direction only "intermittently,"[81] and there are a number of signs that the later essays resist a wholesale irrationalism. In *A Pluralistic Universe*, for example, there are indications of

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[78] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, 292.

[79] Ibid., 351.

[80] Ibid., 349.

[81] Hare, "Introduction," xxxvii.

a more moderate position. On the one hand, it is true, as Myers points out, that James says

> the gist of the matter is always the same--something ever goes indissolubly with something else. You cannot separate the same from its other, except by abandoning the real altogether and taking to the conceptual system. What is immediately given in the single and particular instance is always something pooled and mutual.[82]

James goes on, however, to add that "no one elementary bit of reality is eclipsed from the next bit's point of view, if only we take reality sensibly and in small enough pulses." As well, as Hare also notes, in the Appendix to *A Pluralistic Universe*,

> James does not so much say that concepts falsify the present perceptual flux as that changing reality must be constantly reconceptualized to capture novelties. This suggests that fundamentally James did not wish to discredit all conceptual thinking but only to encourage the development of more flexible thinking.[83]

Assertions by James, then, to the effect that "sensational experiences *are* their 'own others,'" while supporting the contention that he had abandoned the logic of identity, must be taken alongside additional assertions to the effect that notwithstanding such interrelations, the discreteness of the parts of experience, and its recalcitrance in many instances, is not wholly lost. Taken together, all such assertions are supportive of claims by Hare and others that in the later stages of James's struggle to produce a viable account of immediate experience which

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[82] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, 284.

[83] Hare, "Introduction," xl.

unites subject and world without forfeiting the double intentionality of that relation, he was not embracing a wholesale irrationalism but was seeking to overcome the limits of conceptualization through a more inventive use of conceptualization itself.

> Although Bergson's anti-intellectualism doubtless led James to an overzealous attack on the discrete and the static, James's recognition of the reality of continuity in the perceptual flux was a fundamental insight that antedated by decades his contact with Bergson. His problem, which he did not live to solve, was to invent *concepts* that would fairly capture, without self-contradiction, both the continuity and the discreteness of the perceptual flux.[84]

With respect to his later struggles with the notion of immediate experience, then, it can be argued that James was exploring the limits of, rather than entirely abandoning, the logic of identity, and that he was doing so in the pursuit of a level of conceptual creativity which would preserve the double intentionality of immediate, concrete experience in all its complex dynamism and recalcitrance.

A clear resolution of the differences among the positions of Myers, Hare and others regarding James's successes and failures in preserving the double intentionality of immediate experience in his later work remains to be worked out completely. A further detailed pursuit of that issue on my part is beyond the range of this present project. What I have attempted to establish is that the context for the functioning of passional nature in

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[84] Ibid., xxxix.

James's philosophy of religion is immediate experience as a whole, and that passional nature must function in concert with many other elements which together constitute such experience. Charges against James throughout this century for wishful thinking overwhelmingly ignore this major aspect of his thought and so ignore the many elements which restrict the scope of influence of passional nature. What is most needed now, in the attempt to understand James's will to believe doctrine, is a setting aside of the perennial rehearsals of wishful thinking charges, and a closer scrutiny, instead, of James's account of immediate experience, for immediate experience furnishes the context for James's thought on religion, and the role of passional nature in religious belief.

Among the results of a deeper appreciation of the context which James's thought on immediate experience provides for his philosophy of religion would be a better understanding of his recourse to consequences in the adjudication of truth, including the consequences of theism which have been widely touted as prudentially motivating the adoption of theistic belief where such belief does not already exist. While unanalyzable in its immediacy, immediate experience can be subject to scrutiny through reflection upon the concrete relations with the world to which it gives rise, and this is why James appeals to the personal responses of the subject--to satisfaction, utility

and profitability--in connection with truth. When he includes satisfaction among the consequences of holding a particular view, for example, it is not just personal satisfaction that he is talking about, but the fulfilment or disappointment of expectations about the world, about an anticipated "fit" between thought and world which may or may not have actually developed in the course of immediate experience as a whole. "As Chisholm and other critics have pointed out, James did not mean by the satisfactoriness of a theory that it would satisfy certain subjective desires, as certain European critics have maintained. He meant rather its capacity to satisfy certain expectations"[85] about the world.

> Any meaning ultimately points to a reality in some region of the world which is supposed to bear this meaning. If I move by appropriate actions in this direction, and, by a continuous series of steps, finally find myself in the vicinity of a real being which I then find by direct perception, feeling, and response, to have this meaning, it is verified. If, on the other hand, my steps are interrupted by unbridgeable discontinuities and chasms which separate me from the assumed reality, then the meaning is not an adequate guide, and is disconfirmed. Thus if, in reaching for the black pen I seem to see before me, my hand encounters a solid pane of glass separating me from it, my belief was really mistaken, and I was probably seeing only a reflection of the pen.[86]

The same holds true of 'profitability' language.

> By 'most profitable' James does not mean an isolated, subjective feeling of 'profit' or 'satisfaction' that is not a satisfaction in something. The true idea is

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[85] Wild, *Radical Empiricism*, 411.

[86] Ibid., 338.

> profitable in enabling me to orient myself properly in dealing with real beings independent of me.[87]

Such a position not only does not preclude a serious pursuit of objectivity, it gives that pursuit real substance.

> The pragmatic position that concrete truth for us will always be that way of thinking in which our various experiences most profitably combine provides as sure a foothold for nonarbitrary truth as can be provided by any believer in an independent realm of reality. The concrete conditions under which our thinking actually takes place do not permit us to play fast and loose with the order in which experiences come to us without suffering the consequences. And those who appeal to a non-experimental basis for their truth claims, such as is implied in the correspondence formula, are making idle statements of no help in determining any actual truth. Such an empty formula becomes meaningful only insofar as its stated relation of subject to predicate can be shown to be operative within the leading of finite experiences, in which case it is no longer a mere correspondence but the actual working out of 'a leading that is worthwhile.' Objectivity and independence in truth, instead of being undermined by the pragmatic insistence on the irreducibly human component of truth, actually receive their first clear explanation and verifiable support.[88]

This is not a position which so deeply severs the subject from the world that she can indefinitely and with impunity name as 'true' anything which pleases her, as Russell, Myers, Pojman and so many others have charged. It is a position, rather, which attempts to do justice to both the 'unanalyzable' relation with the world in immediate experience, and to the capacity to reflect upon that relation after it has transpired--to consult its consequences, and to interpret the significance of those

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[87] Ibid., 342.

[88] Seigfried, *Reconstruction*, 293.

consequences. It is a position which involves a push and pull among personal interests, the "inward necessity" of conceptual systems, the "resistance" or accommodation by the world of such interests and systems in immediate experience, and the subject's response to that relation in reflection.

Within these terms of reference, factuality and objectivity are both meaningful and important, and James repeatedly affirms their importance in *The Will to Believe* and in correspondence associated with that essay. "When as empiricists we give up the doctrine of objective certitude, we do not thereby give up the quest or hope of truth itself,"[89] he says, and in the main thesis statement of the essay, he asserts, in connection with religion, that indefinitely awaiting evidence has the same risk of losing the "*truth*" as does proceeding without decisive evidence. Religious propositions are said to be potentially "true," "right" and subject to assessment according to "evidence."[90] He also qualifies his endorsement of risk in religious belief by saying that what he has in mind is "the risk of acting as if my passional need of taking the world religiously might be prophetic and *right*" (italics mine),[91] as he puts it analogously in the case of morality. Such allegiance to objectivity is echoed implicitly in the

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[89] James, "Will to Believe," 99.

[90] Ibid., 106.

[91] Ibid.

negative vocabulary with which he speaks, in *The Will to Believe* and elsewhere, in connection with purely idiosyncratic convictions, for he warns against the risk of inadvertently embracing propositions on the basis of "*ill*egitimate cravings." His comments to Mark Baldwin--that observers restrain themselves from judging the integrity of another's beliefs because of the difficulty of determining the measure of the believer's sincerity and evidence--presuppose James's expectation that the individual will pursue such sincerity and evidence in her own intellectual practices.

In his correspondence in connection with *The Will to Believe*, James again indicates that he is anxious to dispel any impression that he is condoning beliefs which have no warrant beyond the wishes of the believer. In a letter to Ralph Barton Perry, for example, he objects strenuously to the notion that satisfaction of desire as such is somehow the *sine qua non* of the determination of truth.

> You speak . . . as if the 'degree of satisfaction' was *exclusive* of theoretic satisfactions. Who ever said or implied this? Surely neither Dewey, Schiller nor I have ever denied that sensation, relation, and funded truth 'dispose,' in their measure, of what we 'propose.' Nothing that we propose can violate them; but *they satisfied*, what *in addition* gratifies our aesthetic or utilitarian demands best will always be counted as *more* true. My position is that, *other things equal*, emotional satisfactions count for truth--among the other things being the intellectual satisfactions.[92]

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[92] Letter of W. James to R. B. Perry, Aug. 4, 1907, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 475.

It is a misrepresentation of James, then, to suggest that the prominence of the role in his epistemology for human inventiveness and personal influences leads necessarily to a field-day for wishful thinking, for the exercise of these influences is circumscribed in many important ways.

It is, of course, true that the various elements which are unified in immediate experience can be pulled far apart in reflective activity. We are capable of standing back retrospectively from immediate experience and manipulating it in an enormous variety of ways. These can range from the tentative hypotheses of the scientist to the body-image of the anorexic adolescent. Such developments may be blatantly self-serving, even delusional. There is no question about our ability to manipulate experience in often self-serving and highly imaginative ways, as James the psychologist knew full well.

Such inventive machinations cannot be separated indefinitely, however, from living; they cannot be preserved indefinitely, that is, from their eventual reintegration back into the immediate experience of either the individual or of her community in which once again "the act-content-object distinction . . . collapses into content alone."[93] This collapse yields precisely the characteristic of immediate experience which I have sought to amplify in this chapter: the *unification* of concept, world, and subject, a

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[93] Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought*, 315.

unification which will give rise to successful or unsuccessful relationships with the world. Subjective influences, then, may for a period of time, or in a particular individual or community, be accorded a degree of autonomy which is able to distort belief. In the long run, however, the incompatibility of such distortions with other aspects of the field of immediate experience into which those distortions will eventually be concretely reintegrated, will expose such distortions for what they are. The largely ahistorical, introspective and individualistic character of much epistemology in this century has occasioned a serious neglect of these crucial aspects of James's position, according to which the adjudication of experience involves social and historical elements.

It is difficult to formulate a description of James's position in the foregoing respects which does justice to its realist component without at the same time undermining its pragmatic character. Carlos Prado's characterization of Dewey's thought, by contrast with Rorty's, is serviceable in this connection. Like Dewey, James essentially holds that with "enough success and consistency in practice and prediction, a theoretical

application works as it does because it *gets things right*."[94] That is to say,

> the best use of intelligence--disciplined and cooperative inquiry--must eventually achieve truth, in the sense that inquiry will result in practices of such efficacy and stability that we can only judge them so because of correctness. Inquiry may not achieve Cartesian certainty, but, always allowing that we might be wrong, it will achieve success explicable only in terms of descriptive correctness. And if we decide we are wrong at any point, it will be that we are *wrong*, not that we have abandoned one story for one we like better.[95]

Prado here locates "efficacy" exactly where James located it--in the context of an ongoing historical dialectic between intelligent reflection and immediate experience. While realist in its own way, James's position is neither conventionally realist nor idealist. It attempts, rather, to find

> a way out of this sterile impasse [between realism and idealism] . . . As Ralph Barton Perry has pointed out, with great penetration, the philosophy of James is neither a philosophy of objects and actions nor a philosophy of ideas; it is a philosophy of the experience of objects and actions in which the subject itself is a participant. The root of James's pragmatism lies here.[96]

It is certainly true, notwithstanding all this, that in many respects, as I have pointed out above, there is what James calls a "looseness" in our relationship with the world. While aware "that heat melts ice, that salt

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[94] C. G. Prado, *The Limits of Pragmatism* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1987), 159.

[95] Ibid., 160.

[96] Edie, *William James and Phenomenology*, 70-71.

preserves meat, that fish die out of water,"[97] and "sure that fire will burn and water wet us,"[98] we are "less sure that thunder will come after lightning, [and] not at all sure whether a strange dog will bark at us or let us go by."[99] Such uncertainty increases in other domains.

> Though nature's materials lend themselves slowly and discouragingly to our translation of them into ethical forms, but more readily into aesthetic forms; to translation into scientific forms they lend themselves with relative ease and completeness. The translation, it is true, will probably never be ended. The perceptive order does not give way, nor the right conceptive substitute for it arise, at our bare word of command."[100]

James might as readily have added that "nature's materials lend themselves slowly and discouragingly to our translation of them" into religious categories also, and what he proposes in *The Will to Believe* is proposed within such terms of reference. James's comments in this respect are reminiscent of C. D. Broad's in a similar connection.

> It is worth while to remember that modern science has almost as humble an ancestry as contemporary religion. If the primitive witch-smeller is the spiritual progenitor of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the primitive rain-maker is equally the spiritual progenitor of the Cavendish Professor of Physics. There has obviously been a gradual refinement and purification of religious beliefs and concepts in the course of history, just as there has been in the beliefs and concepts of science . . . It seems somewhat arbitrary to count this process as a continual approximation to true knowledge

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[97] James, *Principles*, 2: 637.

[98] Ibid., 619.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid., 640.

> of the material aspect of the world in the case of science, and to refuse to regard it as at all similar in the case of religion.[101]

Given the foregoing "looseness," it is not entirely clear what to make of the distinctive experiential states characterizing live theism. Live theism, as I pointed out previously, is, according to *The Will to Believe*, experienced by many people as rooted tenaciously in the "heart," the "instincts,"[102] "good-will,"[103] and even human nature itself, and seems to call for a benefit of the doubt which would not be responsible in all cases of empirical inquiry. It also involves a distinctive noetic element, an intellectual broadening and personal vitality described as the strenuous mood, as will be seen in greater detail in the next chapter. Such states do not stand alone, however. They stand, within immediate experience, alongside additional "empirically given relationships" with the world with which they seem to be congruent. They also, however, stand alongside other aspects of the world involving evil and suffering, for example, with which they do not seem to be congruent. James willingly admits that in many of its common forms, dogmatic theism seems to be irreconcilable with these latter features of the world. He readily

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[101] C. D. Broad, *Religion, Philosophy and Psychical Research* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1930), 200.

[102] James, "Will to Believe," 108.

[103] Ibid., 107.

concedes in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, for example, that he does not know exactly what theological form theism would have to take in order to respond adequately to such incongruities, although he makes some tentative suggestions, including the attribution of finitude to the deity.

Experience as a whole, in other words, is a mixed bag. The distinctive experiences characteristic of live theism are "framed out," in other words, returning to McDermott's phrase, by a diversity of other experiences which preclude either an unqualified acceptance of dogmatic theism, as it is currently received in the Christian West at least, or an unqualified dismissal of it as projection. James nowhere says or even suggests that the decision to acquiesce in an existing theistic propensity makes the "threatening" alternatives go away. On the contrary, the direction of his position in *The Will to Believe*, as I have depicted it so far, is to sustain a dialectical tension between live theism and the considerations by which such a theism is "threatened," a tension which James is eager to sustain because it is only through the pursuit of its resolution that the viability or lack of viability of received theisms or atheisms will gradually be exposed.

Human beings will, of course, vary in their ability and willingness to discern the intellectual significance of the tensions within immediate experience as a whole, in this

respect or in others, and this leaves plenty of room for wishful thinking. There is nothing in *The Will to Believe* or elsewhere in James's corpus, however, which would suggest that he intended to encourage the exploitation of such room for the purposes of indulging in self-deception. He was realistic enough, nevertheless, to understand that any workable epistemology would have to acknowledge the scope for distortion which is made available by the capacity to reflectively disassemble immediate experience, to reconstitute it to one's self-serving advantage, and to ignore some of the perplexing results of such reconstitution in subsequent immediate experience. There is no "rule of thinking" such as Clifford's which can eliminate the exploitation of that latitude where there is a will to exploit it.

A crucial aspect of the intellectual life, James realized, therefore, must be accorded to the irreplaceability of a role for the subject as subject, for a personal willingness to work hard and honestly at recognizing the lessons about certain concepts which emerge from the experiential consequences of integrating those concepts into immediate experience. This, however, involves volition, personal integrity, emotional maturity, character and other such subjective influences. It is for this reason, among others, that James urges an inclusion of such influences in epistemology. These elements are integrated

by James into epistemology, that is, precisely in order to *curtail* wishful thinking and to promote objectivity in belief, contrary to the burden of critical literature which depicts them as opening the door to such abuses. If immediate experience is taken strictly as immediate and given, and its consequences are not self-interpreting, then intellectual progress is dependent upon such human attributes, and upon a willingness on the part of the individual and the community to undertake an honest discernment of the ways in which current thought may, as James puts it, "violate the character with which life concretely comes and the expression which it bears of being, or at least of involving, a muddle and struggle, with an 'ever not quite' to all our formulas, and novelty and possibility forever leaking in."[104]

Sound intellectual progress, then, is dependent upon the acceptance by individuals of personal responsibility for attending closely to *all* the relevant consequences of their beliefs, and here I underscore once again this chapter's emphasis upon the overall unity of experience. It is many of James's commentators, not James, who compartmentalize the many influences which "really do produce our creeds" in a way which leads to much greater autonomy for subjective influences than they actually possess in the position of

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[104] James, 1903 notebook, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 700.

James himself. In his accounts of both the stream of experience and of immediate experience, James seeks to block such compartmentalization, and to block also thereby the autonomy which would be given to subjective influences within the terms of reference of such a compartmentalization. Alongside whatever personal edification some people, for example, may derive from a doctrine of papal infallibility, to take up one of Russell's examples, one must also consult intellectual consequences as well, as James was seen earlier to have emphasized in correspondence with Perry. One such intellectual consequence of claims to papal infallibility might involve the 14th century Avignon papacy during which there were three popes who were proposing mutually exclusive teachings on some important matters, and even excommunicating each other. This historical state of affairs stands in stark conflict with any unqualified imputation of infallibility to the papacy. One of the consequences of holding that the pope is infallible under all circumstances, in other words, is the advent of a blatant conflict with what is well known about the Avignon papacy, and insofar as belief in such infallibility occasions such conflict, it does not pay; it does not work. That is to say, one of the *consequences* of subscribing to papal infallibility is the generating of an intractable conflict between two contentions. It is precisely such a conflict to which a foe of papal

infallibility such as Russell would himself presumably call attention in an inquiry aimed at trying "to settle the plain question of fact" about such a doctrine.

There is nothing in James's position to suggest that the emotional satisfaction which some people seem to derive from being led authoritatively by a person who is purportedly inerrant is in any way more important in the pursuit of fact than is the foregoing conflict. Both are consequences, and James's position does not allow for either to be ignored. The failure of an unqualified doctrine of papal infallibility to square with the Avignon papacy would signal the strong possibility that the positive affective responses engendered among some people by that doctrine may well reflect the intrusion of self-interest. The same point can be applied to James's position with respect to theism. The presence of suffering and evil in the world conflicts seriously with a theism which proposes an omnipotent deity, which is why James proposed, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, that closer attention be given to amending conventional Christian theism to better accommodate this phenomenon.[105]

In sum, then, it is James's contention that while thought in many instances does not simply reproduce the world pictorially like a mirror, neither does it consist

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[105] The liveness of the non-theistic alternative of the live theistic option is deeply indebted to the shortcomings of some forms of theism in this respect.

only of a sequence of Rortian stories. Passional nature is not autonomous in its prerogative of prompting one to affirm truth or falsity of any current convictions whatever, however personally attractive, although neither James nor anyone else can stop abuses from occurring where there is a will on the part of an individual--or sometimes even a community, as James points out in some of his stinging criticisms of American society[106]--to do so. My portrayal of James's position in this respect, admittedly, does not lead to an unambiguous justification of theism, but it was not intended to. It was intended to attack the longstanding propensity among commentators to ignore the centrepiece of James's epistemology--the complex unity of immediate experience--and their propensity to neglect also therefore the degree to which, within such a position, subjective influences are integrally involved, in the long run, in an immediate, multi-dimensional concrete relationship with the world which issues in results and consequences that cannot be responsibly ignored, and which limit the impact of subjective influences.

There is one final piece of this chapter's picture of the unity of immediate experience which remains to be put into place. The willingness to go "half way" in according benefit of the doubt to live theism involves more than just

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[106] James, "Moral Philosopher," 81.

the intellectual openness and responsibility treated in the foregoing pages. It also involves a metaphysical issue having to do with a possible commensurateness between persons and world. To deny benefit of the doubt to the distinctive characteristics of live theism would have serious implications if those phenomena in fact turned out in the long run to reflect a commensurateness between persons and world which is as yet poorly understood. If this did turn out to be the case, the phenomena typical of live theism, that is, would have important epistemological significance, as Myers has observed of James's position.

> The fundamental premise upon which his philosophy of religion rested was that our subjective nature, feelings, emotions, and propensities exist as they do because something in reality harmonizes with them; in so far as they are yearnings and longings, reality will ultimately fulfil them.[107]

If such commensurateness were an entirely hypothetical postulate, one could reasonably conclude, with Myers, returning to wishful thinking charges, that "because we want the world to be a certain way, our desire actually makes it so."[108]

What James actually held, however, is that within the terms of reference of immediate experience as a whole, the postulation of such commensurateness is not entirely gratuitous. What immediate experience makes evident is that

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[107] Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought*, 461.

[108] Ibid.

there is a commensurateness between persons and world at a variety of empirical levels. Questions about the *scope* of such commensurateness between persons and world, a matter which has been subject to renewed debate within epistemology by Alvin Plantinga's most recent work,[109] for example, are inescapable when deciding what would constitute a responsible reception of the distinctive characteristics of live theism. Myers seems to hold, in line with Clifford, that it would be better to proceed on the assumption that the scope of such commensurateness does not extend sufficiently far to justify imputing evidential significance to the distinctive states involved in live theism. Why, James asks pointedly, however, would such a position involve any less a gamble than his own, which gives a benefit of the doubt to such commensurateness? On what basis would it be advisable to discount the evidential significance of certain aspects of immediate experience on the presumption that such a commensurateness does *not* exist?

It is advisable to proceed this way, Clifford would respond, because it reduces the risk of error. Where, however, James rightly asks in *The Will to Believe*, does Clifford show that the most productive road in inquiry is also necessarily always the safest one? We are perfectly

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[109] See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); "Why We Need Proper Function," *Nous* (March 1993).

entitled to adopt Clifford's position, James emphasizes, and to discount a broad commensurateness, and to discount also, on that basis, certain beliefs or propensities to believe. It may turn out in the long run that we were wise to have done so. If, however, with Clifford, we make such a decision, we do so "at our peril as much as if we believed."[110] If it should turn out to be the case that it is only through an experience of the world which accords epistemological significance to certain distinctive subjective states that an existing commensurateness between persons and world can be discovered, then the *a priori* discounting of those states would permanently preclude the discovery of any such commensurateness. If it should turn out that rationality and religiosity involve a commensurateness with the world which is of such a nature that it is only through acquiescence in an existing live theism that theism's intellectual merits could be gradually uncovered, then Clifford's call for the abandonment of that state would turn out to have been "irrational."[111]

This is exactly James's point against Clifford, a point made in connection with James's distinction between fear of error and pursuit of truth.

> This feeling [involved in live theism], forced on us we know not whence, that by obstinately believing that there are gods . . . we are doing the universe the

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[110] James, "Will to Believe," 108.

[111] Ibid., 107.

> deepest service we can, seems part of the living essence of the religious hypothesis. If the hypothesis were true in all its parts, including this one, then pure intellectualism, with its veto on our making willing advances, would be an absurdity; and some participation of our sympathetic nature would be logically required. I, therefore, for one, cannot see my way to accepting the agnostic rules for truth-seeking, or wilfully agree to keep my willing nature out of the game. I cannot do so for this plain reason, that a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule.[112]

Overall, I have argued in this chapter, the role of the subject commended by James in *The Will to Believe* ought to be understood within the terms of reference of James's account of immediate experience as a whole in which the many elements involved exercise a mutually restrictive role, and this includes a possible scope of commensurateness between persons and world which would give epistemological significance to the subjective states involved in live theism. The challenge, therefore, of how to respond to the distinctive characteristics of live theism is a twofold one. It involves an intellectual openness and responsibility which accepts the tension between the conflicting elements of the live religious option, and which resists what James saw as the growing social propensity to dismiss the theistic element of that dialectic out of hand. It also, however, inescapably involves a fundamental metaphysical issue as well.

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[112] Ibid.

> A critic may grant James's plea for religious tolerance and thus respect his right-to-believe without granting any rationality to the need-to-believe. . . The Jamesian philosophy of religion sometimes appears to accept the separation of paths between believers and nonbelievers, and at other times insists upon having the last word. James seems to have held that the need-to-believe is mystically inherent in the world and therefore is *inherently rational*. Just when the critic thinks that the impasse has been mutually recognized and that further dialogue is useless, he must challenge the Jamesian again to protest the parting shot. His sympathy may have been elicited for the genuine need-to-believe, but having granted that its causes and effects warrant investigating, he cannot in good conscience agree that it is a rational need (italics mine).[113]

James would not try to force upon his opponent the view that the distinctive experience of live theism is "inherently rational," but he would, however, tenaciously resist, and rightly so, any view which *assumes* that it is not. The distinctive characteristics of live theism may turn out to involve rationality in as yet unfathomed ways, some of which are speculated about in the Conclusion of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. This, of course, would have important implications with respect to the form that intellectually responsible behaviour should take in relation to live theism in the present. In the present, however, we are not privy to the information we need in this respect, and so we are forced to make a choice which cannot be fully justified. It is a choice, however, which James rightly sees as unavoidable in a consistent *evidentialism*; it is not a fideistic gamble which from the outset surrenders all

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[113] Myers, *James: Life and Thought*, 456-457.

aspirations to evidence, nor does it necessarily open the door to wishful thinking. It is, rather, a prerequisite of responsibly pursuing truth.

It is not just certain subjective states *by themselves*, then, which concern James in *The Will to Believe*, or which are thought by him to justify theism. His concern is with the significance of the ways in which the states characteristic of live theism are congruent with some aspects of immediate experience as a whole, and incongruent with others. His concern is also with the significance of those states if there is a broad commensurateness between persons and world. The importance accorded to the distinctive states characteristic of live theism by James, then, is accorded to them within the context of their relations with many other aspects of the field of experience, of individuals' and communities' ongoing, concrete relations with the world, and of the context of a possible commensurateness between persons and world. In relation to the many constraints involved in this context, such states do not possess the autonomy which would justify the sorts of generalized charges which have been brought perennially against James for having sponsored wishful thinking.

Chapter 4

RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND THE STRENUOUS MOOD

According to most depictions of *The Will to Believe* in the last century, James argued that we are entitled, under the impulse of passional nature, to move ahead of evidence favouring theistic belief, and to embrace such belief in spite of the lack of evidence on its behalf. James's argument to this effect has been construed primarily in two ways. The first of these is prudential. Such a choice would give rise to certain personally desirable consequences which it would be imprudent to ignore. John Hick is one among a number of representatives of such a view, as seen in Chapter 2, and was sharply critical of James for holding it. Hick charged that such a prudential position trivializes religion by reducing it to a self-interested toss of the dice which is comparable, in Hick's judgement at least, to Pascal's wager.

James also justified movement ahead of adequate evidence, it is held, on the basis of the need, as in science, to pursue the truth or falsity of what in *The Will to Believe* is referred to as the religious "hypothesis." Bertrand Russell, among others, has argued that such a

position involves a confusion of belief with hypothesis-adoption, mistakenly assuming that James maintained the permissibility of moving ahead of evidence at the level of hypothesis-adoption, in anticipation of certain as-yet unknown consequences of inquiry, applies as well to the domain of belief.

Both of the foregoing lines of response to James remain influential and both are also seriously flawed, as I will show in this chapter. They are flawed above all by their failure to explore in detail exactly what consequences were in fact held by James to flow from live theism, and the nature of the relationship between those consequences and the belief state. Had the nature of those consequences and their relation to live theism been explored more diligently over the decades commentators would have discovered that James did not hold, nor could he consistently have held, that one ought to adopt religious belief on the basis solely of the personally beneficial consequences to which it gives rise; nor did he confuse belief and hypothesis-adoption in commending live theism in anticipation of its as-yet unknown intellectual consequences.

The major consequences of theism are enumerated and described by James under the heading of the "strenuous mood," a term which is strikingly rare in the literature on *The Will to Believe*. The neglect of this notion has been as significant in its impact upon the reception of James's

essay as has been the neglect of liveness. The neglect of liveness, as I have shown, has obscured the fact that James's main concern in his essay is with the consequences of *abandoning* a live theism, not of creating a theism which does not presently exist. The neglect of the strenuous mood, I will show, has obscured the fact that such an abandonment of theism would involve the loss of the strenuous mood in both its personal and intellectual dimensions because a unique relation exists between that mood and the state of belief. The merits of epistemological norms such as Clifford's, which would essentially require an abandonment of live theism, should be assessed with this loss clearly in view.

Inquiry into what James means by the strenuous mood is best begun by turning to his account of the moral life. In "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" he distinguishes between the "easy-going" and the "strenuous" moods.[1] The ruling sentiment of the easy-going mood, he says, is "the shrinking from present ill."[2] The subject's ideals here are "mere preferences of his own"[3] with which, in the interests of avoiding ill, he can "play fast or loose . . . at will."[4] The easy-going life is not bereft of

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[1] James, "Moral Philosopher," 84.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., 85.

[4] Ibid.

moral substance on this account, by any means, but such substances is limited; the "symphony" of moral allegiances is "played on the compass of a couple of poor octaves"[5] reflective of one's own particular allegiances.

The interests of other persons are present to such a disposition but they are not as pressing as they might otherwise be, James argues. While one may, for example, be solicitous of the welfare of future generations, the claims of those distant generations are not felt with as great an urgency as would be the case in the strenuous mood. This is so because those generations, like ours, along with our efforts on their behalf, are seen as ultimately destined to vanish into an anonymous "vacuous beyond" of extinction. It is the ultimate futility of all such efforts, then--future generations' as well as our own--contends James, which dampens the eagerness to sacrifice present interests on behalf of persons yet to be born; "no need of agonizing ourselves or making others agonize for these good creatures just at present."[6]

When the moral order is understood as having a transcendent origin and destiny, however, the demands of that order are experienced differently, for a broader scope and a permanence accrue to them. "The scale of the symphony is incalculably prolonged. The more imperative ideals now

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

begin to speak with an altogether new objectivity and significance, and to utter the penetrating, shattering, tragically challenging note of appeal."[7] History bears constant testimony, James observes, to the "antagonism of the strenuous and genial moods" in this respect; to the differences between "the ethics of infinitude and mysterious obligation from on high, and those of prudence and the satisfaction of merely finite need."[8]

> The lustre of the present hour is always borrowed from the background of possibilities it goes with. Let our common experiences be enveloped in an eternal moral order; let our suffering have an immortal significance; let Heaven smile upon the earth, and deities pay their visits; let faith and hope be the atmosphere which man breathes in;--and his days pass by with zest; they stir with prospects, they thrill with remoter values. Place round them on the contrary the curdling cold and gloom and absence of all permanent meaning which for pure naturalism and the popular-science evolutionism of our time are all that is visible ultimately, and the thrill stops short, or turns rather to an anxious trembling.[9]

As James puts it on another occasion, "a nameless *unheimlichkeit* comes over us at the thought of there being nothing eternal in our final purposes, in the objects of those loves and aspirations which are our deepest energies."[10]

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 86.

[9] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 124.

[10] William James, *Essays on Faith and Morals*, ed. by Ralph Barton Perry (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company), 83.

The strenuous mood, then, suffuses the moral life as a whole with "the note of infinitude and mystery."[11] It involves "a feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world's selfish little interests"[12] in a way which underlines the differences between "the natural and the spiritual" dispositions towards the world. For the former,

> the world is a sort of rectilinear or one-storied affair, whose accounts are kept in one denomination, whose parts have just the values which naturally they appear to have, and of which a simple algebraic sum of pluses and minuses will give the total worth.[13]

To the spiritual view, the world is a "double-storied mystery" in which "natural good is not simply insufficient in amount and transience." Such natural good, rather, falls short of the human moral aspirations for the *summum bonum* as well, James holds, in a way sometimes reminiscent of Kant. The natural good, "cancelled as it all is by death if not by earlier enemies . . . gives no final balance, and can never be the thing intended for our lasting worship. It keeps us from our real good, rather; and renunciation and despair of it are our first step in the direction of the truth."[14]

We are not dealing here simply with moral sentiments and with a broadening of intellectual horizons, however, but

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[11] James, "Moral Philosopher," 85.

[12] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 220.

[13] Ibid., 143.

[14] Ibid.

with distinctive forms of action which the empirical analyses of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* indicate are uniquely related to the perspective of the strenuous mood. In his preamble to the lectures on saintliness in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James indicates that a survey of the actual behaviour of those living in the strenuous mood of religious belief is "the pleasantest portion of our business,"[15] for here one finds that "the best fruits of religious experience are the best things that history has to show. They have always been esteemed so." One finds extraordinary examples of "charity, devotion, trust, patience, bravery,"[16] and other virtues. The practitioner of love of enemy, for example, while appearing from one point of view to be the hopelessly naive and impractical "dupe and victim of his charitable fever"[17] bent upon a waste of time and energy, nevertheless stands apart from his warring or prudent contemporaries in one important respect. His imprudently risky and vulnerable initiatives make possible, at least, something which surpasses the potential of the use of force--which destroys the enemy--or the use of prudence--which protects only goods presently in hand.[18] Unlike force and prudence, such love

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[15] Ibid., 211.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 284.

[18] Ibid.

of enemy can potentially produce the "vital and essential" regenerative transformation of the enemy into a friend, and the renewal of the human community arising uniquely out of such regeneration.

Not only the enemy, but the socially disenfranchised are drawn into the moral purview of the strenuous mood as well, on James's account, furnishing yet further regenerative contributions to the community, as well as to individuals. The religious identification with the economic outcast, for example, has suffused 16 centuries of monastic and other forms of religious behaviour in a manner which is utterly alien to "the way in which wealth-getting enters as an ideal into the very bone and marrow of our generation."[19] Such material self-abdication through the voluntary adoption of poverty "*is* the strenuous life,"[20] James says; it is a "moral equivalent of war"[21] which transforms the ideal of selfless heroism, traditionally associated with military risk and self-sacrifice, into a strenuous heroism of ascetical identification with the disenfranchised through the voluntary abdication of one's material privileges.

Throughout *The Varieties of Religious Experience* one finds repeatedly James's illustration of direct links

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[19] Ibid., 291.

[20] Ibid., 290.

[21] Ibid.

between religious belief and these, as well as other distinctive forms of behaviour such as the immediate cessation of formerly intractable patterns of destructive and reprehensible activity, and the sudden acquisition of new habits which endure for a lifetime. James's empirical inquiries in this vein, and many other comparable ones independent of his, strongly suggest that in the cases recorded such behaviour would not exist apart from the live theism which appears to have precipitated it. James's study of such links between belief and the distinctive forms of behaviour which accompany it lends substance to his contention in *The Will to Believe* that the abandonment of live theism would have momentous consequences at the level of action.[22]

It is important to explore the extent to which the foregoing depiction of the strenuous mood is congruent with prudential accounts of James which portray him as having proposed a movement beyond evidence based solely upon considerations having to do with the acquisition of the purportedly desirable consequences of theism, and with accounts which fault him for having commended such movement ahead of evidence on the basis of an inadequate appreciation of the differences between belief and hypothesis-adoption. The most recent version of the first of these positions--the

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[22] James, "Will to Believe," 108.

prudential reading of James--has been provided by James Wernham. Wernham's version is a particularly rigorous one, for it denies even hypothetical viability to theism, thereby making the motive of adopting theism entirely prudential. His version also stands alone in having recognized the central place of the strenuous mood in James's account.

According to Wernham, we cannot now decide the relative merits of theism or atheism on evidential grounds. The responsible course of conduct intellectually, therefore, would be to suspend belief and to treat theism as a hypothetical possibility only. The problem here, however, on Wernham's account, is that even a hypothetical theism does not hold much promise. That is to say, if a hypothetical theism were going to contribute to the advancement of inquiry, in Wernham's judgement, there would have to be some means of discovering whether the states of affairs which theism would anticipate being the case do in fact turn out to be the case. At present, we know nothing of the ultimate destiny of the world, about which theism has much to say, and upon which a hypothetical theism's vindication would be significantly dependent. We also know nothing about the ultimate verdict of those who, in the course of human history, will turn out to have been willing to give theism the benefit of the doubt in anticipation of possible future revelations of its merits and liabilities.

As a "tool of inquiry,"[23] then, hypothetical theism has overwhelming liabilities, in Wernham's assessment.

The luxury of suspending belief and abandoning hope of verifying an hypothesis is not always accompanied by the luxury of being able to suspend action as well, however, and this is the case with theism, according to Wernham. As Pascal puts it, we are embarked upon the affair of life; we have no choice about whether or not to choose how to live it. In Wernham's view, it is within our power to choose to live as theists, atheists or agnostics, even while suspending the foregoing intellectual initiatives in relation to them. No matter which way such a choice goes, however, Wernham argues, it will end up being a "pure gamble" which has nothing to do with evidence. He who chooses theism is like the mountain climber in *The Will to Believe* who, Wernham holds, has "no ground for believing" that the jump across the crevice can be made successfully. Neither is there "ground . . . for believing that he cannot"[24] successfully make the leap. Here, as in many other examples offered by Wernham, the gamble is a wholly personal undertaking; passional nature is on its own.

Why would one make such a gamble on theism? What would favour a decision for theism in the absence of sufficient evidence on behalf of either alternative in the

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[23] Wernham, *Heretical*, 102.

[24] Ibid., 20.

theistic gamble? It is prudential considerations alone which favour this decision, on Wernham's account. Unlike other commentators, Wernham has recognized the important place of the strenuous mood in this connection. It would be foolish not to choose theism because an "'immediate reward' . . . attaches to the act itself of betting on that side. That reward James called 'the strenuous mood'."[25] A life lived in the strenuous mood is "the best life whether or not it was also the right life."[26] It would be imprudent to pass up the chance of enjoying the personal benefits of the strenuous mood, Wernham says, and the acquisition of that state justifies taking the gamble on theism.

The motive for adopting theism, then, on Wernham's account of James, is a wholly personal one--the desire to secure its immediate subjective benefits. The choice for theism, that is, even if theism turns out to be factually false, will occasion the benefit of that desirable state. If theism turns out to be true, the prospects are even better; much more will be added to the improvement of this present life, a life which will already have benefitted by having been lived in the strenuous mood. One is 'forced' on prudential grounds, therefore, argues Wernham--not epistemological or ethical ones--to opt for theism.

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[25] Ibid., 103.

[26] Ibid.

What exactly is the "immediate reward" of betting on theism? Unfortunately, Wernham, like other commentators who subscribe to a prudential reading of *The Will to Believe*, never really gets around to exploring the nature of the strenuous mood sufficiently to clarify this matter, and this failure seriously undermines his, and other prudential accounts of James. The aspect of the strenuous mood to which I wish to call particular attention in this connection is that it is not at all the unambiguously desirable state which Wernham and so many others assume it to be. It is the easy-going mood, not the strenuous mood, James was seen above in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" to have pointed out, which avoids ill. The strenuous mood, by contrast, invites many forms of very substantial but eminently avoidable ills. It leads to "agonizing ourselves"[27] over many matters such as the aforementioned contribution we can make to future generations, for example, and to wrestling, in a way which often involves painful dissent from one's community, James adds, over a myriad of other moral matters. It calls for a moral heroism and self-denial, as I indicated earlier, the personal price of which is not at all well represented by the cheerier description of the strenuous mood as occasioning "the keenest possibilities of zest"[28] in human life. Such zest it may

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[27] James, "Moral Philosopher," 85.

[28] Ibid., 86.

ultimately occasion, but at a personal cost from which any sensible person ought initially, at least, to shrink, a cost which has been universally overlooked in the literature on James's essay. The strenuous mood actually *invites* many ills which one is able to endure, says James, "if only the greater ideal be attained."[29] Its intellectual demands are no less arduous, as I will show below, for the strenuous mood is very much the enemy of comforting solutions to difficult questions, satisfying declarations of comprehensiveness of understanding and theory, and gratifying resolutions of perplexing tensions among competing conceptions.

The sometimes arduous moral consequences of the strenuous mood bear little resemblance to the better-known soothing consequences attributed to theism by Freud, for example, although prudential readings of James seem on the whole to be much more congruent with the Freudian version of theism than they are with James's. The Freudian theism of *The Future of an Illusion*, for instance, generates the consoling security of confidently believing oneself to be protected by an almighty Father, and of the blissful anticipation of future rewards for present forbearance and religious conformity. James, by striking contrast, vigorously attacks conventional moral conformism as often deeply at odds with real moral integrity. Such conformism

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[29] Ibid., 84.

frequently amounts to little more than the bland "moral holiday" from the ascetical and creative pursuit of real justice, a holiday which seems so predictably, he laments, to accompany conventional religious belief in an omnipotent and apocalyptic divine Solver-of-all-human-problems.

The strenuous mood leads not to such a secure, conformist moral holiday but away from it. Rather than Freud's comfortable believer, one would be better to choose as a representative of the Jamesian strenuous mood someone like Hans Jäggerstätter, for example.[30] Jäggerstätter, an Austrian peasant well accustomed to fighting in his younger days, was beheaded by German authorities on August 9, 1943 for refusing to fight in the German military during World War II. James would have seen in Jäggerstätter an exemplification of the strenuous mood not just because of Jäggerstätter's resistance to the Nazis, or because of his invocation of transcendent origins for his principles, but because of his resistance at the same time to the considerable efforts of his church pastor, his bishop and townsfolk, all of whom encouraged him to participate in the war, if only to kill Bolsheviks. James would have commended in Jäggerstätter the recognition, in painful--and ultimately fatal--defiance of convention, of the ways in which his countrymen and church, as well as the Nazis, had failed to

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[30] Gordon Zahn, *In Solitary Witness: The Life and Death of Franz Jäggerstätter* (London: Chapman, 1966).

see the centrality of inclusiveness in the moral life--an inclusiveness which includes Bolsheviks--and the unusual demands which such inclusiveness may make under particular historical conditions.

> The course of history is nothing but the story of men's struggles from generation to generation to find the more and more inclusive order. . . Society has shaken itself into one sort of relative equilibrium after another by a series of social discoveries quite analogous to those of science. Polyandry and polygamy and slavery, private warfare and liberty to kill, judicial torture and arbitrary royal power have slowly succumbed to actually aroused complaints.[31]

It is Jäggerstätter, not the Freudian believer, who best embodies the inventive and often ascetical and self-sacrificing vigour of the strenuous mood in its allegiance to the fundamentally inclusive character of the moral life. That mood bears little resemblance to the pedestrian utilitarianism so often imputed to James's ethics, or to the safe haven of Freudian theism. One "reward," to use Wernham's term, then, which attached itself to Jäggerstätter's strenuous mood was the loss of his head, something which prudential accounts of James would likely have difficulty accommodating.

Parallel observations can be made regarding the intellectual dimension of the strenuous mood, although these are not as extensively developed by James explicitly under the heading of the strenuous mood. What James does hold explicitly regarding the intellectual element of the

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[31] James, "Moral Philosopher," 80.

strenuous mood, as seen previously, is that religion sets the mundane historical order in the context of a broader, supernatural order; it creates an "infinite perspective," and in so doing locates the intellectual field in relation to a horizon of "infinitude and mystery."[32] This horizon of infinitude and mystery could be reasonably anticipated to have an unsettling, not a stabilizing and comforting effect upon the intellectual life as a whole. It would undermine certitude, in theological as well as secular matters, and heighten attentiveness to the possibility of unanticipated ways of thinking and understanding. In *The Will to Believe*, for example, James vigorously rejects the notion that "religion primarily seeks to solve the intellectual mystery of the world."[33] What religion does is sustain a tension between the mundane historical fact of existence, and the horizon of infinitude and mystery against which that fact is viewed. It thereby sustains difficult *questions*, and it is such questions, not dogmatic formulae, which are the life-blood of real religiosity.

> However particular questions connected with our individual destinies may be answered, it is only by acknowledging them as genuine questions, and living in the sphere of thought which they open up, that we become profound. But to live thus is to be religious. . . By being religious we establish ourselves in possession of

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[32] James, "Moral Philosopher," 85.

[33] James, "Will to Believe," 124.

> ultimate reality at the only points at which reality is given us to guard [our own concrete existence].[34]

In the "half-wild, half-saved universe" envisioned by religion there is no telling what may turn out to be the case, and such uncertainty loosens the hold of conventional thought and claims to certainty in all domains, along with the intellectual security which attends these. In the place of certitude it should generate an alert attentiveness, a being-on-the-lookout which energetically probes beyond the conventional and dogmatic, like James's intellectual heros such as Tolstoy, who developed an uncommonly insightful appreciation of the moral demands arising out of the proliferation of violence; Whitman, who equally insightfully saw a significance in parts of nature considered insignificant by his contemporaries; Louis Agassiz, who singled out features of the natural order which escaped the notice of his colleagues.

In the theological domain, an intellectual horizon broadened by the strenuous mood would be no less subversive of certainty than it is in secular matters. It would not furnish pat and personally consoling dogmas or pseudo-scientific answers which close questions in the way, for example, that the Vatican tried theologically to close questions which Galileo rightly recognized not to admit of theological answers. Neither would it be exhausted by any

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[34] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 388.

body of theological pronouncements, something from which *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is devoted in great part to freeing the experiential element of live theism. There is no doubt that religion is very often pressed into the service of the desire to close questions, providing thereby a convenient and personally advantageous 'God-of-the-gaps,' as Dietrich Bonhoeffer once put it. Religion so construed, however, has no place in James's thought. On James's account, religion does not provide satisfying and consoling immutable dogmas which one would be prudent to adopt in order to set the mind at ease. On the contrary, the tension that one finds in the strenuous mood between the basic orientation to a transcendent, and the need to specify conceptually the nature of that transcendent, would be a source of much intellectual perplexity and uncertainty unknown in the easy-going mood, or to the Freudian believer. This tension is an inescapable corollary of James's account of the strenuous mood, for the fundamental orientation to the transcendent which characterizes religiosity at its root, on James's account, is an orientation which is always historical in its actual occurrence, and so takes place within the terms of reference of a variety of specific conceptual systems. Not all, or even any such systems do justice to the reality which they aspire to describe, however.

James, therefore, rightly holds the conceptual aspect of religiosity in a tension with its horizon of infinitude and mystery, a theme which pervades *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Particular dogmatic beliefs, therefore, constitute the "hypothetical"[35] element of live theism, and must always be held only tentatively and uncomfortably in recognition of their potential insufficiency. The resulting tension between the ever-developing and often inadequate theoretical elements of theism, and the mysterious transcendent horizon of the intellectual life as a whole, lies at the heart of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and occasions a range of intellectual perplexities and uncertainties which are far removed from the experience of the self-assured theological dogmatist or the Freudian believer.

Overall, then, at the intellectual level, the strenuous mood could be anticipated to create many perplexing questions--theological and otherwise. In this it is strikingly at variance once again with the comfort and self-assurance of the easy-going mood. Neither Wernham nor other commentators ever even include a consideration of such matters in their prudential accounts of James, however. While James did claim that the vigorous engagement of life characterizing the strenuous mood awakens a deeply rewarding "zest," the details of the form of life involved with such

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[35] Ibid., 355.

zest indicates that it comes at an uncomfortably high price, both morally and intellectually, which would likely be shunned--as it in fact has been shunned generation after generation--even by many of those who embrace religions subscribing to the inclusive counter-cultural love of enemy, identification with the outcast, and wariness of dogmatism. The longstanding prudential views of James's association of theism with its purportedly pleasurable consequences uniformly ignore such important details of the strenuous mood, and are seriously compromised by such oversight. Many of the actual consequences which James associated with the strenuous mood would scarcely motivate the creation of the belief state which supposedly leads to them.

It should be added to the foregoing considerations that, as I indicated previously in the dissertation, the very notion that consequences of *any* kind, pleasurable or otherwise, were considered by James to legitimate or make possible the creation of a particular belief is explicitly ruled out by James himself. The belief state cannot be created by an individual, even if she clearly recognizes the beneficial consequences which would flow from possessing it, as James will be seen below to have appreciated in Pascal's position. No amount of personal desire for the subjective benefits of the strenuous mood, James says clearly, can by itself create the intellectual horizon from which those subjective benefits flow, and upon which they are dependent.

> "The will to believe" cannot be stretched as far as that [willingly 'letting go' of one's intellectual apprehensions about theism]. We can make ourselves more faithful to a belief of which we have the rudiments, but we *cannot create a belief out of whole cloth* when our perception actively assures us of its opposite (italics mine).[36]

If it is not prudential considerations which legitimate belief in advance of evidence, perhaps James was arguing that the nature of inquiry itself requires such initiative. Russell, Wernham and others have read James this way, but have contended that such a position involves a confusion of belief and hypothesis-adoption. James, I will argue, was not at all unclear about the differences between belief and hypothesis-adoption, as further inquiry into the strenuous mood will bear out. He chose to defend belief rather than hypothesis-adoption in the case of theism for clear and sound reasons.

Wernham provides a helpful entry way into this issue. He rightly points out that there is a "highly paradoxical" need under some circumstances to run ahead of evidence in order to be evidentially responsible, and he rightly asks "whether 'believe' is really the right word" to use in relation to the position advanced by James on this matter in *The Will to Believe* with respect to religion.[37] Are we dealing, in cases of religion, with movement ahead of

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[36] Ibid., 176.

[37] Wernham, *Heretical*, 50.

evidence which should take the form of believing, of hypothesis-adoption, or of some other kind of response, an action of some kind, perhaps? "If James's argument [in *The Will to Believe*] is to be one for believing theism, he will have to argue that the option posed by theism is forced, and momentous too, from the point of view of belief."[38]

Wernham's judgement on this issue is that James "gives no . . . argument"[39] on behalf of a need to believe, nor should he have given one, for evidential considerations do not warrant theistic belief, and it is not necessary to believe in order to inquire hypothetically into a certain intellectual possibility, or to act upon it. James failed to understand the need to distinguish among belief, hypothesis-adoption, and gambling in his essay; he "did not choose between these different things: he chose all of them,"[40] and in so doing carelessly ignored important differences among them.

Certainly, Wernham is right to insist upon appropriate distinctions being made here. I may sometimes be forced to form hypotheses in advance of adequate evidence on their behalf, for example, but I am not forced to believe such hypotheses in advance of convincing evidence on their behalf. I may sometimes be forced as well to act in advance

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[38] Ibid., 102.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., 101.

of adequate evidence--as when I come to a fork in a road--but may once again not be forced to believe anything regarding some aspects, at least, of the choices involved in such action. It would seem, then, that it may not have been belief but hypothesis-adoption, or perhaps action of some kind, that James was really talking about in his essay, but that he was unclear about the relation among these.

James, however, was clear on this matter. He was well aware of the differences between believing and unbelieving theisms and he deliberately chose to argue on behalf of the former. His long neglected comments about Pascal in *The Will to Believe* in particular reveal this awareness, although those comments have been poorly interpreted by Wernham, and ignored by practically everyone else. As even Wernham himself acknowledges, James argued that a "faith 'adopted wilfully after . . . a mechanical calculation' can be a sham only, a counterfeit faith."[41] Wernham fails, however, to undertake a sufficiently thorough exploration of James's repeated assertions to this effect, assertions that religiosity, in its unbelieving, mechanical form, is such a "sham," and that it is a form in which religiosity is "put to its last trumps."[42] Pascal also thought ill of such a religiosity, James judged. Pascal was

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[41] Ibid., 78.

[42] James, "Will to Believe," 91.

defending something which had "far other springs"[43] than such a calculated theism, but it is only at the end of Pascal's argument that this becomes clear, a stage of the argument which Wernham would prefer that we ignore, for it links the state which, in Pascal's argument is essentially the equivalent of James's strenuous mood, uniquely with belief.

Late in Pascal's wager argument an important development occurs. The sceptic discovers, to his surprise, that there is a crucial respect in which his prudential gamble--which is strikingly similar to Wernham's version of James--has not worked out as expected. Just when the wager argument seems to have carried the day, an unanticipated complication develops. The sceptic's aspiration after the theism which has been shown to be personally advantageous falls unexpectedly short. What he discovers is that a peculiar and unanticipated discontinuity exists between a hypothetical, wagered theism, and the form of theism characterizing actual religious believers. He discovers, moreover, that his own best efforts are of no avail in extending his present unbelieving theism to that further believing level.

The wager argument, in other words, has shown and convinced the sceptic that theism is important and beneficial. It is something, therefore, that prudence would

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[43] Ibid.

direct him to embrace, as Wernham also holds. What the sceptic also discovers, however, to his consternation, is that he is unable to embrace it in the form in which it is embraced by actual religious people. Why should he care about this? Wernham argues stridently that he should not. There is "nothing at all" for him to worry about in this respect; "his problem is a non-problem."[44] So pervasively influential in Wernham's case is a determination to drive apart hypothesis-adoption, belief and wagering that he finds the sceptic's worry about being unable to connect the wager with belief to be a "curious response."[45] Faith and hypothesis-adoption are unrelated, Wernham insists over and over again, and so there is no reason to linger over the sceptic's concern that his mechanically adopted hypothetical theism cannot be extended into a believing theism. Wernham even tries exegetically to unhinge the sceptic's dismay about being unable to believe, from the wager argument which precedes it in Pascal's text. The issue of faith is raised only in the final stages of Pascal's wager argument, Wernham contends; it is merely a "sequel" which comes after "the argument proper is now complete."[46]

Wernham's efforts to the foregoing effect notwithstanding, Pascal's sceptic is plainly worried, and

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[44] Wernham, *Heretical*, 76.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 76.

his worries are anything but an unrelated addendum to the wager argument; they are an explicit extension of the wager. Having been brought to recognize the merits of adopting theism, the sceptic only now becomes aware that there is yet another, unanticipated hurdle before him; he discovers that he is unable to lay hold of such merits. It is the gap between the hypothetical and believing theisms which comes to the fore here, because certain consequences attend one, but not the other. He is stuck recognizing the value of something that he cannot lay hold of, and it is only this which would make sense of the tone of dismay in his plea that "I . . . am so made that I cannot believe. What, then, would you have me do?"[47]

Such perplexity would make no sense whatever if it were cut off, as Wernham cuts it off, from the text which precedes it, for such perplexity is directly related to the achievements of reason which have led up to this point in the essay. The role of reason is clear: "reason brings you to this," the sceptic is told; it has shown the importance of believing, and the prudence of doing so. It has also, however, revealed an inability to believe.[48] The latter is as much a part of reason's contribution as the former, Pascal says, and together the two foregoing lessons

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[47] Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensées* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1932), 68.

[48] Ibid.

constitute the contribution that reason is capable of making at this stage in the sceptic's life. It is not more "increase in proofs" that is needed, counsels Pascal; philosophical argument has done its job by successfully showing to the sceptic the merits of theism, and by showing him the road that lies yet ahead, a road, however, along which reason has also shown the sceptic that it is unable by itself to lead him. A wager argument cannot bring into existence the form of theism whose merits it is capable of exhibiting. It cannot create a *live* theism. Even a clear recognition of the benefits of theism, in other words, cannot occasion the form of theism which will give rise to those consequences.

James clearly recognized, with Pascal, that it is possible to argue, as Wernham does, that one should bet on theism with a view to one's self-interest, regardless of whether theism is true or not, in order to attain its beneficial consequences. He also recognized that theism could be adopted hypothetically as well as in a believing form. He rejected these lines of argument, however, and recognized that Pascal had done likewise. The theism in which Pascal was really interested had "far other springs" than such self-interest, James was seen above to have observed. The only purpose of Pascal's wager argument--and, analogously, James's appeals to empiricist principles and scientific vocabulary in *The Will to Believe*--is to provide

one "last desperate snatch at a weapon against the hardness of the unbelieving heart."[49] Such appeals might at least unearth an existing live theism in a cultural atmosphere ill disposed to recognizing it.

As a first stage in responding to charges against James for having confused belief, hypothesis-adoption, and wagering, then, it can be said that James, like Pascal, was clearly aware that he had chosen to defend the belief state. Both James and Pascal distinguish sharply between nonbelieving and believing theisms, and both do so because they deliberately associate the beneficial consequences of theism exclusively with the belief state.

The next stage in responding to charges with respect to James's purported confusion of belief and hypothesis-adoption involves a closer inquiry into why James associates religious belief and the strenuous mood as he does. What is characteristic of analyses such as Wernham's is a separation of the strenuous mood from the belief state. Wernham, that is, sees no differences among belief, hypothesis-adoption, and gambling when it comes to the strenuous mood. This is not to say, he admits, that believing and unbelieving theisms are completely indistinguishable. "No doubt," he concedes, "some benefits attach to believing that God exists

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[49] James, "Will to Believe," 91.

which do not attach to betting that he does."[50] Wernham does not spell out what these might be, however, and there is no indication that, whatever they are, a believing theism would add anything to a hypothetical or a wagered theism in the pursuit of the intellectual and evidential merits of theism. It is just as well, therefore, on Wernham's account, that James neglected "to argue that the option posed by theism is forced, and momentous too, from the point of view of belief," because it is not.

On this point, Wernham is wrong. The option posed by theism is in fact forced from the point of view of belief because the strenuous mood is a function uniquely of belief. Wernham's error on this matter is partly exegetical in origin. According to him, James thought that "the capacity for . . . [the strenuous mood] could be activated . . . by postulating theism, not just by believing it."[51] In support of such a contention, James is cited as having said that "we, as would-be philosophers, must *postulate* a divine thinker, and pray for the victory of the religious cause . . . so that our postulation of him after all serves only to let loose in us the strenuous mood" (italics mine).[52] Such a statement certainly appears to associate the strenuous

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[50] Wernham, *Heretical*, 95.

[51] Ibid., 103.

[52] James, "Moral Philosopher," 86.

mood with a nonbelieving as well as with a believing theism, and appears as well to support Wernham's argument.

While well-chosen, this single sentence from James is the entirety of the textual support provided by Wernham on behalf of an association of the strenuous mood with a nonbelieving, as well as a believing theism. This thinness of support on such a pivotal issue is not surprising, for the sentence cited turns out to be one of the loneliest in James's corpus if it is taken literally. For one thing, it cuts against the grain of much in the very essay in which it is found, according to which the strenuous mood is said to occur "when we *believe* that a God is there" (italics mine);[53] it "is set free in those who have religious *faith*" (italics mine).[54] That sentence also cuts dramatically against the grain of the entirety of the *Varieties of Religious Experience* which, from beginning to end, repeatedly asserts an association of the strenuous mood exclusively with religious belief. Religion, James says, "wherever it is an active thing, involves *a belief* in ideal presences, and a belief that in our prayerful communion with them, work is done, and something real comes to pass" (italics mine).[55] Moreover, between such active belief and

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[53] Ibid., 85.

[54] Ibid., 86.

[55] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 380.

theoretical or hypothetical theisms there is a world of difference. "He who lives the life of it [religion], however narrowly, is a better servant than he who merely knows about it, however much. Knowledge about life is one thing; effective occupation of a place in life, with its dynamic currents passing through your being, is another."[56]

There are more than exegetical questions involved in Wernham's analysis of James on the relation between belief and the strenuous mood, however. Wernham also fails to grasp the inseparability of the intellectual and personal elements of the strenuous mood, and the dependency of that mood upon belief because of such inseparability. At the purely hypothetical or non-believing level--which Wernham himself very strongly emphasizes involves no convictions whatever about the world--there would be no reason why theism should have any personal impact at all. What occasions the personal component of the strenuous mood is the connection which the individual makes between herself, as an existing individual, and certain metaphysical beliefs. As a part of reality, that is, the individual is personally implicated in particular metaphysical contentions about reality. One makes this connection not just because of a personal desire that it be so, or in order to attain personal edification, but because it is philosophically appropriate to do so.

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[56] Ibid.

A believing theism, then, because it involves the conviction that certain metaphysical propositions are true, also involves a crucial connection between the individual, as a particular existent, and those propositions about existence in general. What is believed--held to be a fact about the world--implicates me insofar as I am a piece of that world, and certain affective responses to this connection are entirely appropriate, and are constitutive of the personal component of the strenuous mood. It is belief, in the case of theism, then, which causes the abstract theological contentions about the nature of the world to implicate the subject herself, to register with a personal "pinch," as James calls it; to be for the individual not just more abstractions which have no particular implications for one's existence, but part of what James calls the "full fact": "a conscious field *plus* its object as felt or thought of *plus* an attitude towards the object *plus* the sense of a self to whom the attitude belongs."[57]

Even Russell conceded that the edifying consequences of theistic belief would be appropriate if theism were factually true. A believed theism involves the assertion of such factuality, and a recognition of the implications for the believer herself of such purported facts. Whether the believer is correct in asserting factuality of the propositions involved certainly has to be addressed, and I

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[57] Ibid., 387.

will return to this matter. The point here, however, is that in instances of believing theism, which is the subject matter of *The Will to Believe*, she does assert such factuality, and it is upon the strength of this assertion--upon her belief--that the full emergence of the personal component of the strenuous mood is contingent. The inseparability of the personal from the intellectual elements of the strenuous mood, then, links that mood to the belief state, and does so in a way which not only undermines criticisms of James for having confused belief and hypothesis-adoption, but also undermines prudential readings of *The Will to Believe* which see James as having advocated the formation of a belief in order to secure its desirable consequences, without regard for intellectual considerations.

The foregoing link between belief and the strenuous mood is further strengthened by another distinctive aspect of the religious belief state. In addition to the broadening of the general intellectual horizon about which I have already spoken earlier in this chapter, a more specific intellectual element is to be found in many cases of believing theism which James could be reasonably expected to have associated with the strenuous mood. James's extensive research involved in producing *The Varieties of Religious Experience* made it apparent to him, as many others have

held,[58] that the religious experiences often accompanying believing theism involve a distinctive noetic element which has evidential significance with respect to the truth or falsity of theism. The kind of theistic belief with which James is concerned, I hasten to emphasize here, is not the "dull habit"[59] which carries many a purported believer numbly through her weekly rituals, but a theism possessing deep roots and experiential force. The noetic element of religious experience, it should be added, is not confined to a handful of mystics. James warns his audience that his study includes a disproportionate number of unusual and mystical anecdotes for methodological reasons; an understanding of the normal is much enhanced by an examination of its exaggerated forms. In its nonexaggerated form, James contends on a number of occasions, religious experience is widespread among theists.

Believing theism, then, as an actual phenomenon, often possesses certain distinctive noetic characteristics. Many experiences reported in *Varieties of Religious*

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[58] C. D. Broad, *Religion, Philosophy, and Psychical Research* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1930); Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970); Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, tr. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923); W. T. Stace, ed., *The Teachings of the Mystics* (New York, New American Library of World Literature, 1960); A. E. Taylor, "The Vindication of Religion," *Essays Catholic and Critical*, ed. Edward Gordon Selwyn (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1926), 70-80; R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

[59] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 25.

Experience are "as convincing to those who have them as any direct sensible experience can be."[60] Such experiences are reported in terms not just of personal edification or subjective feeling, I emphasize, but in terms of "genuine perceptions of truth."[61] This phenomenon of "perceiving truths not known before"[62] recurs throughout James's empirical research. One finds among such reports, moreover, the widespread claim that the noetic element involved in such instances more closely resembles an increased breadth and depth of insight than do forms of understanding garnered through scientific inquiry, for example, and that belief in the factuality of theism is related closely to such "states of *insight* into depth of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect."[63]

Such states are not without analogy to more common everyday incidents. Facts about the world are often asserted on the basis of insights which are enormously difficult to justify, or even to describe well. James himself notes the sometimes surprising emergence of such insights, observing that there are instances in which "we have a thought, or we perform an act, repeatedly, but on a certain day the real meaning of the thought peals through us

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[60] Ibid., 73.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., 202.

[63] Ibid., 300.

for the first time, or the act has suddenly turned into a moral responsibility."[64] In the longer term, decades of parenting or teaching or poverty or sickness, for example, bring with them in thoughtful persons a depth and breadth of understanding of particular phenomena which underwrite many factual claims in such areas which are extremely difficult to justify satisfactorily to their critics.

The phenomena of this kind reported widely in James's empirical work raise a significant philosophical challenge. Canons of empirical justification, it is reported on a wide scale, do not function well in relation to such insight, or to the beliefs occasioned by them. This raises significant questions about the appropriate *scope* of application of conventional canons of empirical justification such as those seemingly presupposed by Clifford. To assume that such canons are applicable to the experiences recorded in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and in many other places would beg the question raised by the claims of the subjects involved in those studies. There is no scholarly consensus regarding a resolution of the epistemological challenges raised by the ongoing standoff between these two widely attested intellectual phenomena: the success of conventional empirical standards of evidential justification in many compartments of the intellectual relationship between human

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[64] Ibid., 165.

beings and the world, and a consistent challenge of those same standards, on a very widespread scale, in the religious domain.

One should, of course, be very wary of attempts by anyone to justify claims of fact based upon privileged experience, and James shows himself eager in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* to hold that even widely attested reports can make no claim upon persons who have not been privy to the experiences involved. This does not, however, diminish the philosophical demands that are placed by such phenomena--as phenomena--upon the philosopher who purports to take empiricism seriously. The scope of theism historically and socially, which has consistently given rise to such reports, is arresting. It cuts across intellectual, social, political, economic, linguistic, gender, and innumerable other lines, and has done so on an extraordinary historical scale. While diverse, and revealing the imprint of the subjects who report them, the historical records of such experiences, and the intellectual claims arising out of them, exhibit no greater a diversity and personal influence, as James argues in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, than does the history of philosophy. Such experiences, moreover, are congruent with an exceedingly long *fides quaerens intellectum* tradition of philosophy running continuously from Augustine and before, to Anselm and Aquinas and many philosophers today.

While written prior to *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and to *Radical Empiricism*, *The Will to Believe* exhibits Radical Empiricism's characteristic aversion to premature closure of any questions such as those raised by the conflicts between intellectual phenomena involved in religious experience, and those involved in empirical analysis. James's essay exhibits a deep reticence about the widespread cultural propensity to beg such questions by automatically privileging conventional canons of evidentially responsible behaviour without due regard for the magnitude of the challenge to those very canons by such a widespread and long lived phenomenon as theism. It would not be an exaggeration to say that such reticence is the primary force behind *The Will to Believe*, as well as of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. "The current of thought in academic circles runs against me," he reports, "and I feel like a man who must set his back against an open door quickly if he does not wish to see it closed and locked."[65]

James's defense of belief rather than some nonbelieving state in *The Will to Believe* is much more an exhibition of his determination not to beg the question at this level than it is a sponsoring of fideism. It is an exhibition of exactly the kind of empirical rigor and resistance to premature claims to comprehensiveness for

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[65] Ibid., 405.

which James was rightly commended even by Russell in Russell's critical analysis of pragmatism. Here, the distinctive character of the American tradition of philosophy, typified by James's Radical Empiricism, plays an important role in appreciating the nature of James's argument in *The Will to Believe*. Such a tradition forcefully holds the empiricist responsible for taking into account, in forming epistemological theory and developing norms of responsible doxastic behaviour, *all* the relevant phenomena accessible to us, *as* they are found. Many commentators, embracing a less vigorous form of empiricism, have missed the crucial role that such a radical empiricism plays in James's philosophy of religion. Louis Dupré is a welcome exception here, summoning the philosopher to recapture, in the analysis of James, the distinctive character of

> that radical empiricism which American philosophy so excitingly introduced at the beginning of this century. Most philosophical studies on religion of the recent past are totally outdated. In contrast with them the work of James, Royce, Hocking retains all its original freshness. The reason, I would guess, is that those authors, raised in the hard school of a pioneering country where a man had to find things out for himself, deemed it necessary to acquire experience before interpreting it. Nor did they, as the "empiricists" of the past, restrict experience to sense perception and its interpretation. Those men let no one tell them what was, and what was not "meaningful" as experience. Unfortunately, since then the "radical" American empiricism has again been replaced by the narrow variety

> of which it had discarded the sensationalist dogmatism.[66]

It is in this spirit that James resists overturning live theism on Clifford's grounds. Choices have to be made about the epistemological significance of the foregoing noetic elements of many a theistic belief state, and those choices will lead to different outcomes regarding judgements about what constitutes intellectually responsible behaviour in relation to live theism. In this respect James's position is reminiscent of W. T. Stace's challenge to those who would presume to declare what constitutes the full scope of rationality. Mystical consciousness, Stace points out,

> is a psychological fact of which there is abundant evidence. To deny or doubt that it exists as a psychological fact is not a reputable opinion. . . Whether it has any value or significance beyond itself, and if so what--these, of course, are matters regarding which there can be legitimate differences of opinion.[67]

James's aim in *The Will to Believe* is to protect *all* such differences of opinion from the vagaries of intellectual fashion, and particularly from what he saw as a growing cultural propensity to spontaneously deny benefit of the doubt to religious phenomena. He was rightly unwilling to allow questions about the full scope of what constitutes

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[66] Louis Dupré, *The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), 126-7.

[67] W. T. Stace, ed., *The Teachings of the Mystics* (New York: New American Library, 1960), 14.

rational behaviour to be considered settled as long as the foregoing disputes continued.

I have argued in this chapter against prudential readings of James, and against the accusations that he confused belief and hypothesis-adoption, and have done so based largely upon what James says about the strenuous mood, and what can be further inferred about that mood from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. James was very clear that it was the belief state which needed to be defended, for the strenuous mood is uniquely related to this state. He was equally clear that even the aspects of the strenuous mood which are desirable would not and could not enable or justify the creation of the form of belief which engenders that mood. James did not hold, moreover, as is usually said of him, that the cultivation of theistic belief is justified by its edifying personal benefits, regardless of concerns about factuality. It would have made no sense for him to have counselled the adoption of religious belief in order solely to secure the edifying personal consequences of such belief when his position so prominently precludes such a position, both implicitly and explicitly, as I have shown. Prudential readings such as Wernham's subordinate belief to the terms of reference of the individual's own narrowly personal and self-serving ambitions for affective edification alone, whereas the Jamesian strenuous mood is a byproduct of a self-abandoning allegiance to a "greater

ideal"[68] than such personal edification, both morally and intellectually. I have shown James to have held that the domination of one's intellectual life by narrowly self-interested terms of reference would preclude the emergence of such consequences. Paradoxically, the prudential desire to achieve the exclusively personal, beneficial consequences of theism for one's own individual advantage alone involves a narrowness which is so at odds with the self-forgetful posture of the strenuous mood that such desire is all by itself an insuperable impediment to the attainment of such a mood. The paradox of the strenuous mood is that the narrowing of perspective occasioned by seeking its affective component alone, and entirely for one's individual, personal benefit without regard for fact, is utterly antithetical to the personal motivation, the particular intellectual horizon and the noetic elements of the strenuous mood. Hick was right to attack the prudential argument for theism as vigorously as he did on analogous grounds. He was wrong, however, in taking James to have advanced such an argument.

It must be acknowledged, however, as Russell rightly pointed out, that even false beliefs can generate real personal results. A believing theism, in other words, could conceivably involve false belief but could still have essentially the same intellectual and personal consequences as would be the case if it were true. It is possible, in

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[68] James, "Moral Philosopher," 84.

other words, that theism is false, and that the strenuous mood is a function of a false belief. James did not deny such a possibility. On the contrary, he willingly conceded that religious experiences and the invigorating results of them--which we can presume that he intended to include in the strenuous mood--"may be nothing but . . . [the subject's] subjective way of feeling things, a mood of his own fancy, in spite of the effects produced."[69] It is highly fashionable after Freud, Feuerbach and Nietzsche to interpret the phenomenon which James designates as the strenuous mood in this way, and there are some powerful arguments which would favour such a position.

These are not conclusive arguments, however, as continuing debate makes clear, and so we are once again forced to return, at bottom, to the risk element of James's case in *The Will to Believe* which I subjected to analysis in the previous chapter. James's essay, I argued there, and from the outset of the dissertation, is an inquiry into the significance of the *abandonment* of a belief state which presently occasions certain unique personal and intellectual consequences. What would constitute responsible behaviour in relation to such a state, James is asking, in view of the fact that its abandonment would bring about the loss of the

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[69] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 394.

strenuous mood in both its personal and intellectual aspects?

Given the complexity of the intellectual life, and unresolved issues involving the commensurateness between the various aspects of that life--including the distinctive marks of live theism--and the world itself, there is no neutral frame of reference from within which one may respond to this challenge. James, as I indicated in the last chapter, does not question the permissibility of adopting Clifford's position. What he attacks is the *presumption* that the adoption of that position is neutral, and that it avoids the risks involved in the maintenance of a live theism. There is no less risk in overturning a live theism, and losing the strenuous mood which uniquely attends it, than there is in acquiescing in that theism and in that mood, with its personal and intellectual consequences. This will remain the case as long, as Myers has observed, as "no established discipline can give a straightforward definition"[70] of the need-to-believe phenomenon which clarifies once and for all the degree to which it does or does not involve a commensurateness with the world. There is at this historical point, then, no risk-free strategy to adopt, and it is in virtue of an uncritical and unwarranted cultural presumption, argues James, that Clifford's position is seen to be such a strategy. The personal decision

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[70] Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought*, 457.

commended by *The Will to Believe* to move ahead of decisive evidence and to sustain a live theism, along with the strenuous mood to which it gives rise, then, is an unavoidable part of a sound *evidentialist* position, not a fideistic one, and has nothing to do with self-interested prudence or with a confusion of belief and hypothesis-adoption.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the last century, I have shown, *The Will to Believe* has been widely understood to have proposed a prudential argument sponsoring a fideistic movement ahead of evidence in the adoption of religious belief. This movement has been criticized vigorously on two main counts. First, such a position, it is said, endorses potentially self-interested appeals, on the basis of passional nature, to the beneficial consequences of theism. Second, it confuses hypothesis-adoption, in which movement ahead of evidence is permissible, and belief, in which it is not.

I have argued that a closer analysis of liveness, of the details of exactly what consequences James held to flow from live theism, and of the role of the subject within the context of immediate experience as a whole, undermines such a reception of James's position. The will to believe doctrine was concerned principally with what would constitute an appropriate response to an *existing* phenomenon--live theism--with the personal as well as the intellectual elements of the strenuous mood to which such theism gives rise. James nowhere contended that the creation of a belief, religious or otherwise, is justified on prudential grounds. On the contrary, in explicit

connection with the will to believe doctrine he disavowed the notion that it is even possible to create a belief, much less that it is a responsible course of action to create one for exclusively self-serving purposes. What he defended in *The Will to Believe* were certain existing beliefs, and this against the background of what he observed in correspondence about *The Will to Believe*, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and elsewhere to be an increasingly entrenched cultural predisposition against theism which risked rendering it "dead" before its actual merits could eventually be assessed with an openness required by empiricist principles. Such cultural developments, supported by Clifford-like invocations of evidence, James essentially held, greatly underestimate the complex interrelation of many influences involved in live propositions.

The role for the subject which James commended, and the significance which he assigned to the consequences of live theism, were understood by him within the terms of reference of such complexity. That complexity involves what John Wild has termed a 'double intentionality' wherein subject and world are simultaneously implicated in the constitution of experience in a way which precludes a clear, introspective disentangling of their respective roles.[1]

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[1] On this fundamental point, James's position has relevance for current debate regarding the relation of subject and world. See for example John McDowell's *Mind and*

"Does the river make its banks, or do the banks make the river?" James once put it; "does a man walk with his right leg or with his left leg more essentially? Just as impossible may it be to separate the real from the human factors in the growth of our cognitive experience."[2]

This complex interrelation, I have argued, lies at the heart of James's account of liveness in *The Will to Believe*. I have also argued that the difficulties involved in introspectively disentangling subject and world do not lead irremediably to the subjectivism and to the wishful thinking with which James has traditionally been charged. Intellectual inventiveness and passional nature, on James's account, have a physical, metaphysical, social, cultural, linguistic and historical setting, all of which elements are constitutive in their own way of immediate experience. These many elements play a restrictive role in relation to each other even when the precise natures of such roles is not clearly distinguishable upon introspection. Pragmatism's appeals to utility and workability--involving *all* the available consequences of particular conceptions and beliefs--are advanced within such terms of reference. These terms of reference also provide the setting for James's contention that there may be a congeniality between the knower and the world. Such congeniality would make the

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World (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[2] James, *Pragmatism*, 121.

distinctive characteristics of live theism epistemologically significant. Such restrictive terms of reference, however, impede any indiscriminate invocation of such congeniality for the purposes of appealing solely to personal desire as justification for religious or any other kinds of belief.

Because *The Will to Believe* is much indebted to James's account of immediate experience as a whole, further analysis of the essay, I have contended, rather than continuing to isolate the subject and to proceed thereupon to rehearse the now-familiar general broadsides about subjectivism, wishful thinking, and so on, should inquire more carefully into James's account of immediate experience, and its significance with respect to his positions on liveness, the strenuous mood and passional nature. The widespread neglect of such inquiry in relation to *The Will to Believe* during the last century has given much ongoing support to highly questionable prudential readings of James, readings which have in turn spawned stereotypical but dubious charges against him, especially for wishful thinking.

If one locates *The Will to Believe* within the terms of reference I have suggested, it becomes apparent that James was defending live theism because such theism is experienced by a large number of actual individuals and communities as *reasonable*, and because intellectual responsibility demands respect for such reasonableness. On

the one hand, James holds, such reasonableness is to a significant extent a contextual matter involving a constellation of historical, linguistic, cultural, temperamental, and other influences. Such contextual considerations lie behind his emphasis upon the contingency of liveness. On the other hand, however, such reasonableness is not an entirely contextual matter, for James. His historicizing and contextualizing of inquiry was not intended to lead to a wholesale relativization of it. This is reflected in his repeated assertions of allegiance to the pursuit of objectivity in belief, and to evidential responsibility.

The juxtaposition of the foregoing allegiance to objectivity and the contextualization of inquiry does not reflect inconsistency in James's thought. Rather, it manifests his attentiveness to the diversity of influences which together generate the experience of reasonableness. Both intellectual and existential considerations play important roles in the constitution of such reasonableness. This is the case, as Myers has pointed out, for example, in the recognition by many philosophers of the value of their own philosophical activity.

> When it goes very well it is as if thinking and living have merged into a single, harmonious, and vibrant process, as if thinking has found its goal in a newfound health of experiencing. . . By making his own mental pictures reflect the unimpeded flow of pure experience, James felt a restoration, through thought itself, of a

> healthful fluency of thought that is the *mark of rationality* (italics mine).[3]

The theism which it was James's aim to consider in *The Will to Believe* was defended by him above all because for him, and for many other intellectually responsible persons, it possessed such marks of rationality. This is not to say that such reasonableness was taken by him to furnish a knock-down vindication of theism. Nor was it taken to provide any guarantee that an intrusion of self-interest is not to some degree involved. What James argues with respect to theism, and many other beliefs, is that it is their reasonableness which guides the highly fallible ongoing effort to discern the manner in which the embodiment of such beliefs within immediate experience affects such experience.[4] This is an historical and social process as much as it is an individual one, a process ultimately guided by existing concepts and beliefs together with an openness to their potential inadequacies.

Overall, then, it has been my contention that a closer scrutiny of liveness and of the strenuous mood, together with a contextualization of the role assigned by James to passional nature within the terms of reference of immediate experience, will reveal in *The Will to Believe* a

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[3] Gerald Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought*, 343.

[4] James, 1903 notebook, Perry, *Thought and Character*, 2: 700.

position which does not deserve its fideistic reputation. It ought, rather, to be given a place of significance among the diverse non-fideistic epistemologies which are currently involved in debate within the philosophy of religion.

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