

as doubt is the beginning of philosophy; it is not also the end and fulfillment. The end is happiness, and philosophy is only a means; if we take it as an end we become like the Hindu mystic whose life-purpose is to concentrate upon his navel.

Perhaps Santayana's conception of the universe as merely a material mechanism has something to do with this sombre withdrawal into himself; having taken life out of the world, he seeks for it in his own bosom. He protests that it is not so; and though we may not believe him, his too-much-protesting disarms us with its beauty:

A theory is not an unemotional thing. If music can be full of passion, merely by giving form to a single sense, how much more beauty or terror may not a vision be pregnant with which brings order and method into everything that we know. . . . If you are in the habit of believing in special providences, or of expecting to continue your romantic adventures in a second life, materialism will dash your hopes most unpleasantly, and you may think for a year or two that you have nothing left to live for. But a thorough materialist, one born to the faith and not half plunged into it by an unexpected christening in cold water, will be like the superb Democritus, a laughing philosopher. His delight in a mechanism that can fall into so many marvellous and beautiful shapes, and can generate so many exciting passions, should be of the same intellectual quality as that which the visitor feels in a museum of natural history, where he views the myriad butterflies in their cases, the flamingoes and shell-fish, the mammoths and gorillas. Doubtless there were pangs in that incalculable life; but they were soon over; and how splendid meantime was the pageant, how infinitely interesting the universal interplay, and how foolish and inevitable those absolute little passions.⁴⁶

But perhaps the butterflies, if they could speak, would remind us that a museum (like a materialist philosophy) is only a show-case of lifeless things; that the reality of the world eludes these tragic preservations, and resides again in the pangs of passion, in the ever-changing and never-ending flow of life.

"Santayana," says an observant friend,

had a natural preference for solitude. . . . I remember leaning over the railing of an ocean liner anchored at Southampton and watching passengers from the English tender crowd up the gang-plank to the steamer; one only stood apart at the edge of the tender, with calm and amused detachment observed the haste and struggle of his fellow-passengers, and not till the deck had been cleared, followed himself. 'Who could it be but Santayana?' a voice said beside me; and we all felt the satisfaction of finding a character true to himself.⁴⁷

After all, we must say just that, too, of his philosophy: it is a voracious and fearless self-expression; here a mature and subtle, though too sombre,

⁴⁶R. in *Science*, pp. 89-90.

⁴⁷Margaret Münsterberg in *The American Mercury*, Jan., 1924, p. 69.

soul has written itself down quietly, in statuesque and classic prose. And though we may not like its minor key, its undertone of sweet regret for a vanished world, we see in it the finished expression of this dying and nascent age, in which men cannot be altogether wise and free, because they have abandoned their old ideas and have not yet found the new ones that shall lure them nearer to perfection.

II. WILLIAM JAMES

I. PERSONAL

The reader will not need to be reminded that the philosophy which we have just summarized is a European philosophy in everything but the place of its composition. It has the nuances and polish and mellow resignation characteristic of an old culture; one could tell from any paragraph in the *Life of Reason* that this is no native American voice.

In William James the voice and the speech and the very turn of phrase are American. He pounced eagerly upon such characteristic expressions as "cash-value," and "results," and "profits," in order to bring his thought within the ken of the "man in the street"; he spoke not with the aristocratic reserve of a Santayana or a Henry James, but in a racy vernacular and with a force and directness, which made his philosophy of "pragmatism" and "reserve energy" the mental correlate of the "practical" and "strenuous" Roosevelt. And at the same time he phrased for the common man that "tender-minded" trust in the essentials of the old theology which lives side by side, in the American soul, with the realistic spirit of commerce and finance, and with the tough persistent courage that turned a wilderness into the promised land.

William James was born in New York City in 1842. His father was a Swedenborgian mystic, whose mysticism did no damage to his wit and humor; and the son was not lacking in any of the three. After some seasons in American private schools, William was sent with his brother Henry (one year his junior) to private schools in France. There they fell in with the work of Charcot and other psychopathologists, and took, both of them, a turn to psychology; one of them, to repeat an old phrase, proceeded to write fiction like psychology, while the other wrote psychology like fiction. Henry spent most of his life abroad, and finally became a British citizen. Through his more continuous contact with European culture he acquired a maturity of thought which his brother missed; but William, returning to live in America, felt the stimulation of a nation young in heart and rich in opportunity and hope, and caught so well the spirit of his age and place that he was lifted on the wings of the *Zeitgeist* to a lonely pinnacle of popularity such as no other American philosopher had ever known.

He took his M.D. at Harvard in 1870, and taught there from 1872 to his death in 1910, at first anatomy and physiology, and then psychology, and at last philosophy. His greatest achievement was almost his first—*The Principles of Psychology* (1890); a fascinating mixture of anatomy, philosophy and analysis; for in James psychology still drips from the foetal membranes of its mother, metaphysics. Yet the book remains the most instructive, and easily the most absorbing, summary of its subject; something of the subtlety which Henry put into his clauses helped William James to the keenest introspection which psychology had witnessed since the uncanny clarity of David Hume.

This passion for illuminating analysis was bound to lead James from psychology to philosophy, and at last back to metaphysics itself; he argued (against his own positivist inclinations) that metaphysics is merely an effort to think things out clearly; and he defined philosophy, in his simple and pellucid manner, as "only thinking about things in the most comprehensive possible way."⁴⁸ So, after 1900, his publications were almost all in the field of philosophy. He began with *The Will to Believe* (1897); then, after a masterpiece of psychological interpretation—*Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902)—he passed on to his famous books on *Pragmatism* (1907), *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), and *The Meaning of Truth* (1909). A year after his death came *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1911); and later, an important volume of *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912). We must begin our study with this last book, because it was in these essays that James formulated most clearly the bases of his philosophy.⁴⁹

2. PRAGMATISM

The direction of his thought is always to things; and if he begins with psychology it is not as a metaphysician who loves to lose himself in ethereal obscurities, but as a realist to whom thought, however distinct it may be from matter, is essentially a mirror of external and physical reality. And it is a better mirror than some have believed; it perceives and reflects not merely separate things, as Hume supposed, but their relations too; it sees everything in a context; and the context is as immediately given in perception as the shape and touch and odor of the thing. Hence the meaninglessness of Kant's "problem of knowledge" (how do we put sense and order into our sensations?)—the sense and the order, in outline at least, are already there. The old atomistic psychology

⁴⁸*Some Problems of Philosophy*, p. 25.

⁴⁹The reader who has leisure for but one book of James's should go directly to *Pragmatism*, which he will find a fountain of clarity as compared with most philosophy. If he has more time, he will derive abundant profit from the brilliant pages of the (unabbreviated) *Psychology*. Henry James has written two volumes of autobiography, in which there is much delightful gossip about William. Flournoy has a good volume of exposition, and Schinz's *Anti-Pragmatism* is a vigorous criticism.

of the English school, which conceived thought as a series of separate ideas mechanically associated, is a misleading copy of physics and chemistry; thought is not a series, it is a stream, a continuity of perception and feeling, in which ideas are passing nodules like corpuscles in the blood. We have mental "states" (though this is again a misleadingly static term) that correspond to prepositions, verbs, adverbs and conjunctions, as well as "states" that reflect the nouns and pronouns of our speech; we have feelings of *for* and *to* and *against* and *because* and *behind* and *after* as well as of matter and men. It is these "transitive" elements in the *flow* of thought that constitute the thread of our mental life, and give us some measure of the continuity of things.

Consciousness is not an entity, not a thing, but a flux and system of relations; it is a point at which the sequence and relationship of thoughts coincide illuminatingly with the sequence of events and the relationship of things. In such moments it is reality itself, and no mere "phenomenon," that flashes into thought; for beyond phenomena and "appearances" there is nothing. Nor is there any need of going beyond the experience-process to a soul; the soul is merely the sum of our mental life, as the "Noumenon" is simply the total of all phenomena, and the "Absolute" the web of the relationships of the world.

It is this same passion for the immediate and actual and real that led James to pragmatism. Brought up in the school of French clarity, he abominated the obscurities and pedantic terminology of German metaphysics; and when Harris and others began to import a moribund Hegelianism into America, James reacted like a quarantine officer who has detected an immigrant infection. He was convinced that both the terms and the problems of German metaphysics were unreal; and he cast about him for some test of meaning which would show, to every candid mind, the emptiness of these abstractions.

He found the weapon which he sought when, in 1878, he came upon an essay by Charles Peirce, in the *Popular Science Monthly*, on "How to Make Our Ideas Clear." To find the meaning of an idea, said Peirce, we must examine the consequences to which it leads in action; otherwise dispute about it may be without end, and will surely be without fruit. This was a lead which James was glad to follow; he tried the problems and ideas of the old metaphysics by this test, and they fell to pieces at its touch like chemical compounds suddenly shot through with a current of electricity. And such problems as had meaning took on a clearness and a reality as if, in Plato's famous figure, they had passed out of the shadows of a cave into the brilliance of a sun-lit noon.

This simple and old-fashioned test led James on to a new definition of truth. Truth had been conceived as an objective relation, as once good and beauty had been; now what if truth, like these, were also relative to human judgment and human needs? "Natural laws" had been taken as

"objective" truths, eternal and unchangeable; Spinoza had made them the very substance of his philosophy; and yet what were these truths but formulations of experience, convenient and successful in practice; not copies of an object, but correct calculations of specific consequences? Truth is the "cash-value" of an idea.

The true . . . is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as "the right" is only the expedient in the way of our behaving. Expedient is almost any fashion; and expedient in the long run and on the whole, of course; for what meets expediently all the experiences in sight won't necessarily meet all further experiences equally satisfactorily. . . . Truth is *one species* of good, and not, as is usually supposed, a category distinct from good, and coördinate with it. The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief.⁵⁰

Truth is a process, and "happens to an idea"; verity is verification. Instead of asking whence an idea is derived, or what are its premises, pragmatism examines its results; it "shifts the emphasis and looks forward"; it is "the attitude of looking away from first things, principles, 'categories,' supposed necessities, and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts."⁵¹ Scholasticism asked, What is the thing,—and lost itself in "quiddities"; Darwinism asked, What is its origin?—and lost itself in nebulas; pragmatism asks, What are its consequences?—and turns the face of thought to action and the future.

3. PLURALISM

Let us apply this method to the oldest problem in philosophy—the existence and nature of God. The Scholastic philosophers described the deity as "*Ens a se extra et supra omne genus, necessarium, unum, infinite, perfectum, simplex, immutabile, immensum, eternum, intelligens.*"⁵² This is magnificent; what deity would not be proud of such a definition? But what does it mean?—what are its consequences for mankind? If God is omniscient and omnipotent, we are puppets; there is nothing that we can do to change the course of destiny which His will has from the beginning delineated and decreed; Calvinism and fatalism are the logical corollaries of such a definition. The same test applied to mechanistic determinism issues in the same results: if we really believed in determinism we would become Hindu mystics and abandon ourselves at once to the immense fatality which uses us as marionettes. Of course we do not accept these sombre philosophies; the human intellect repeatedly proposes them because of their logical simplicity and symmetry, but life ignores and overflows them, and passes on.

A philosophy may be unimpeachable in other respects, but either of two defects will be fatal to its universal adoption. First, its ultimate principle

⁵⁰Pragmatism, pp. 222, 75, 53, 45.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 54.

⁵²P. 121.

must not be one that essentially baffles and disappoints our dearest desires and most cherished hopes. . . . But a second and worse defect in a philosophy than contradicting our active propensities is to give them no object whatever to press against. A philosophy whose principle is so incommensurate with our most intimate powers as to deny them all relevancy in universal affairs, as to annihilate their motives at one blow, will be even more unpopular than pessimism. . . . That is why materialism will always fail of universal adoption.⁵³

Men accept or reject philosophies, then, according to their needs and their temperaments, not according to "objective truth"; they do not ask, Is this logical?—they ask, What will the actual practice of this philosophy mean for our lives and our interests? Arguments for and against may serve to illuminate, but they never prove.

Logic and sermons never convince;

The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul. . . .

Now I re-examine philosophies and religions.

They may prove well in lecture rooms, yet not prove at all under the spacious clouds, and along the landscape and flowing currents.⁵⁴

We know that arguments are dictated by our needs, and that our needs cannot be dictated to by arguments.

The history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments. . . . Of whatever temperament a professional philosopher is, he tries, when philosophizing, to sink the fact of his temperament. Temperament is no conventionally recognized reason, so he urges impersonal reasons only for his conclusions. Yet his temperament really gives him a stronger bias than any of his more strictly objective premises.⁵⁵

These temperaments which select and dictate philosophies may be divided into the tender-minded and the tough-minded. The tender-minded temperament is religious, it likes to have definite and unchanging dogmas and *à priori* truths; it takes naturally to free will, idealism, monism, and optimism. The tough-minded temperament is materialistic, irreligious, empiricist (going only on "facts"), sensationalistic (tracing all knowledge to sensation), fatalistic, pluralistic, pessimistic, sceptical. In each group there are gaping contradictions; and no doubt there are temperaments that select their theories partly from one group and partly from the other. There are people (William James, for example) who are "tough-minded" in their addiction to facts and in their reliance on the senses, and yet "tender-minded" in their horror of determinism and their need for religious belief. Can a philosophy be found that will harmonize these apparently contradictory demands?

⁵³Principles of Psychology, New York, 1890, vol. ii, p. 312.

⁵⁴Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Philadelphia, 1900, pp. 61, 172.

⁵⁵Pragmatism, p. 6.

James believes that pluralistic theism affords us such a synthesis. He offers a finite God, not an Olympian thunderer sitting aloof on a cloud, "but one helper, *primus inter pares*, in the midst of all the shapers of the great world's fate."⁵⁶ The cosmos is not a closed and harmonious system; it is a battle-ground of cross-currents and conflicting purposes; it shows itself, with pathetic obviousness, as not a uni- but a multi-verse. It is useless to say that this chaos in which we live and move is the result of one consistent will; it gives every sign of contradiction and division within itself. Perhaps the ancients were wiser than we, and polytheism may be truer than monotheism to the astonishing diversity of the world. Such polytheism "has always been the real religion of common people, and is so still today."⁵⁷ The people are right, and the philosophers are wrong. Monism is the natural disease of philosophers, who hunger and thirst not (as they think) for truth, but for unity. "The world is One!"—the formula may become a sort of number-worship. 'Three' and 'seven' have, it is true, been reckoned as sacred numbers; but abstractly taken, why is 'one' more excellent than 'forty-three,' or than 'two million and ten'?"⁵⁸

The value of a multiverse, as compared with a universe, lies in this, that where there are cross-currents and warring forces our own strength and will may count and help decide the issue; it is a world where nothing is irrevocably settled, and all action matters. A monistic world is for us a dead world; in such a universe we carry out, willy-nilly, the parts assigned to us by an omnipotent deity or a primeval nebula; and not all our tears can wipe out one word of the eternal script. In a finished universe individuality is a delusion; "in reality," the monist assures us, we are all bits of one mosaic substance. But in an unfinished world we can write some lines of the parts we play, and our choices mould in some measure the future in which we have to live. In such a world we can be free; it is a world of chance, and not of fate; everything is "not quite"; and what we are or do may alter everything. If Cleopatra's nose, said Pascal, had been an inch longer or shorter, all history would have been changed.

The theoretical evidence for such free will, or such a multiverse, or such a finite God, is as lacking as for the opposite philosophies. Even the practical evidence may vary from person to person; it is conceivable that some may find better results, for their lives, from a deterministic than from a libertarian philosophy. But where the evidence is indecisive, our vital and moral interests should make the choice.

If there be any life that it is really better that we should lead, and if there be any idea which, if believed in, would help us to lead that life, then

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 298.

⁵⁷*Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York, 1902, p. 526.

⁵⁸*Pragmatism*, p. 312. The answer, of course, is that unity, or one system of laws holding throughout the universe, facilitates explanation, prediction, and control.

it would be really *better for us* to believe in that idea, *unless, indeed, belief in it incidentally clashed with other greater vital benefits.*⁵⁹

Now the persistence of the belief in God is the best proof of its almost universal vital and moral value. James was amazed and attracted by the endless varieties of religious experience and belief; he described them with an artist's sympathy, even where he most disagreed with them. He saw some truth in every one of them, and demanded an open mind toward every new hope. He did not hesitate to affiliate himself with the Society for Psychological Research; why should not such phenomena, as well as others, be the object of patient examination? In the end, James was convinced of the reality of another—a spiritual—world.

I firmly disbelieve, myself, that our human experience is the highest form of experience extant in the universe. I believe rather that we stand in much the same relation to the whole of the universe as our canine and feline pets do to the whole of human life. They inhabit our drawing rooms and libraries. They take part in scenes of whose significance they have no inkling. They are merely tangent to curves of history, the beginnings and ends and forms of which pass wholly beyond their ken. So we are tangent to the wider life of things.⁶⁰

Nevertheless he did not think of philosophy as a meditation on death; no problems had value for him unless they could guide and stimulate our terrestrial career. "It was with the excellencies, not the duration, of our natures, that he occupied himself."⁶¹ He did not live in his study so much as in the current of life; he was an active worker in a hundred efforts for human betterment; he was always helping somebody, lifting men up with the contagion of his courage. He believed that in every individual there were "reserve energies" which the occasional midwifery of circumstance would bring forth; and his constant sermon, to the individual and to society, was a plea that these resources should be entirely used. He was horrified at the waste of human energy in war; and he suggested that these mighty impulses of combat and mastery could find a better outlet in a "war against nature." Why should not every man, rich or poor, give two years of his life to the state, not for the purpose of killing other people, but to conquer the plagues, and drain the marshes, and irrigate the deserts, and dig the canals, and democratically do the physical and social engineering which builds up so slowly and painfully what war so quickly destroys?

He sympathized with socialism, but he disliked its deprecation of the individual and the genius. Taine's formula, which reduced all cultural manifestations to "race, environment, and time," was inadequate precisely because it left out the individual. But only the individual has value;

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 299.

⁶¹Kallen, *William James and Henri Bergson*, p. 240.

everything else is a means—even philosophy. And so we need on the one hand a state which shall understand that it is the trustee and servant of the interests of individual men and women; and on the other a philosophy and a faith which shall “offer the universe as an adventure rather than a scheme,”⁵² and shall stimulate every energy by holding up the world as a place where, though there are many defeats, there are also victories waiting to be won.

*A shipwrecked sailor, buried on this coast,
Bids you set sail.
Full many a gallant bark, when we were lost,
Weathered the gale.⁵³*

4. COMMENT

The reader needs no guide to the new and the old elements in this philosophy. It is part of the modern war between science and religion; another effort, like Kant's and Bergson's, to rescue faith from the universalized mechanics of materialism. Pragmatism has its roots in Kant's “practical reason”; in Schopenhauer's exaltation of the will; in Darwin's notion that the fittest (and therefore also the fittest and truest idea) is that which survives; in utilitarianism, which measured all goods in terms of use; in the empirical and inductive traditions of English philosophy; and finally in the suggestions of the American scene.

Certainly, as everyone has pointed out, the manner, if not the substance, of James's thinking was specifically and uniquely American. The American lust for movement and acquisition fills the sails of his style and thought, and gives them a buoyant and almost aerial motility. Huneker calls it “a philosophy for philistines,” and indeed there is something that smacks of salesmanship in it: James talks of God as of an article to be sold to a materialistically-minded consumer by every device of optimistic advertising; and he counsels us to believe as if he were recommending long-term investments, with high dividends, in which there was nothing to lose, and all the (other) world to win. It was young America's defense-reaction against European metaphysics and European science.

The new test of truth was of course an ancient one; and the honest philosopher described pragmatism modestly as “a new name for old ways of thinking.” If the new test means that truth is that which has been tried, by experience and experiment, the answer is, Of course. If it means that personal utility is a test of truth, the answer is, Of course not; personal utility is merely personal utility; only universal permanent utility would constitute truth. When some pragmatists speak of a belief having been true once because then useful (though now disproved), they utter

⁵²Chesterton.

⁵³Quoted by James (*Pragmatism*, p. 297) from the Greek Anthology.

nonsense learnedly; it was a useful error, not a truth. Pragmatism is correct only if it is a platitude.

What James meant to do, however, was to dispel the cobwebs that had entangled philosophy; he wished to reiterate in a new and startling way the old English attitude towards theory and ideology. He was but carrying on the work of Bacon in turning the face of philosophy once more towards the inescapable world of things. He will be remembered for this empirical emphasis, this new realism, rather than for his theory of truth; and he will be honored perhaps more as a psychologist than as a philosopher. He knew that he had found no solution for the old questions; he frankly admitted that he had expressed only another guess, another faith. On his desk, when he died, there lay a paper on which he had written his last, and perhaps his most characteristic, sentences: “There is no conclusion. What has concluded that we might conclude in regard to it? There are no fortunes to be told and there is no advice to be given. Farewell.”

III. JOHN DEWEY

1. EDUCATION

After all, pragmatism was “not quite” an American philosophy; it did not catch the spirit of the greater America that lay south and west of the New England states. It was a highly moralistic philosophy, and betrayed the Puritanic origins of its author. It talked in one breath of practical results and matters of fact, and in the next it leaped, with the speed of hope, from earth to heaven. It began with a healthy reaction against metaphysics and epistemology, and one expected from it a philosophy of nature and of society; but it ended as an almost apologetic plea for the intellectual respectability of every dear belief. When would philosophy learn to leave to religion these perplexing problems of another life, and to psychology these subtle difficulties of the knowledge-process, and give itself with all its strength to the illumination of human purposes and the coordination and elevation of human life?

Circumstances left nothing undone to prepare John Dewey to satisfy this need, and to outline a philosophy that should express the spirit of an informed and conscious America. He was born in the “effete East” (in Burlington, Vermont, 1859), and had his schooling there, as if to absorb the old culture before adventuring into the new. But soon he took Greeley's counsel and went West, teaching philosophy at the universities of Minnesota (1888-9), Michigan (1889-94), and Chicago (1894-1904). Only then did he return East, to join—and later to head—the department of philosophy at Columbia University. In his first twenty years the Vermont environment gave him that almost rustic simplicity which characterizes him even now that all the world acclaim him. And then, in his