

as it should, but it evidently has a necessary function. It suffers, as it always has, from man's ignorance and evil, and from that deadening secularism which knows only material forces, seeks only material goods, and is destructive of all ideal interests. But the new messiahs that threaten its place or primacy—science, the machine, communism, fascism, and the rest—one after another either pass away or take their subordinate position. What men are seeking today is not to abolish religion but to find one that is adequate.

Most simply stated, *it is the function of religion to help man to see the highest in his world and to achieve the highest in his life*. We may distinguish three aspects of this function: the rational, the mystical, and the ethical.

(1) *Religion as rational* gives man an insight into final meanings and ultimate reality; it furnishes a world view and a philosophy of life. The first task of religion is to help a man to unify his world, to see things whole and to see their meaning. This is *integration by insight*. Not only in nature, but in history, religion finds one Power that directs and one Purpose that rules.

(2) *Religion as mystical* leads man into fellowship with the Eternal, into the supreme life-giving relation. Religion must secure inner wholeness, *personal integration*. It means harmonizing of warring impulses through some higher goal and master motive that will insure alike unity and energy and satisfaction. It is a way of freedom through the mastery of one's world.

(3) *Religion as ethical* means both ideal and power. It reveals life's meaning and its highest goods. By its faith it gives men confidence and courage for the adventure of living. While science furnishes knowledge and techniques, it creates the needed inner spirit which makes possible our living and working together in mutual good-will and common devotion. Where ethics presents goals, religion furnishes dynamic. Where psychology analyzes, religion unifies and creates. *Religion thus supplies the conditions necessary for man's higher life: vision, confidence, aspiration, loyalty, and love.*

Religion helps man to secure life by right relations to his fellows, that is, by *social integration*. The absolute need of religion at this point grows increasingly apparent. Its fourfold task will be: (a) to assert the sacredness of human personality; (b) to set free the spirit of man from the divisive forces of selfishness, hatred, and fear; (c) to reshape the institutions of our social life so that they will minister to humanity and not be the exploitative instruments of the few; (d) to show how the life of the individual is fulfilled in the life of the group, and the life of the group in that of the larger whole.

Religion transforms man's world by showing him the God who is creator and ruler and goal. It transforms his life by giving him an object of faith and worship and fellowship. It transforms his relations with his fellows by creating in him a spirit of reverence and good-will. The function of religion, then, is to show man the meaning of his world in the light of God and to give man fullness of life through right relations with God and his world.

We may say, then, that religion is man's life as conceived and lived in relation to a world of a higher order, upon which he feels himself dependent, to which he knows himself under obligation, and in relation with which he finds life's meaning and seeks its completion.

83. THE WILL TO BELIEVE *

William James (1842-1910)

A. CREATIVE FAITH MAY PRODUCE ITS OWN VERIFICATION

The desire for a certain kind of truth brings about that special truth's existence; and so it is in innumerable cases of other sorts. Who gains promotions, boons, appointments, but

* *The Will to Believe* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897). Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

the man in whose life they are seen to play the part of live hypotheses, who discounts them, sacrifices other things for their sake before they have come, and takes risks for them in advance? His faith acts on the powers above him as a claim, and creates its own verification.

A social organism of any sort whatever, large or small, is what it is because each member proceeds to his own duty with a trust that the other members will simultaneously do theirs. Wherever a desired result is achieved by the cooperation of many independent persons, its existence as a fact is a pure consequence of the precursive faith in one another of those immediately concerned. A government, an army, a commercial system, a ship, a college, an athletic team, all exist on this condition, without which not only is nothing achieved, but nothing is even attempted. A whole train of passengers (individually brave enough) will be looted by a few highwaymen, simply because the latter can count on one another, while each passenger fears that if he makes a movement of resistance, he will be shot before any one else backs him up. If we believed that the whole car-full would rise at once with us, we should each severally rise, and train-robbing would never even be attempted.

There are, then, cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming. *And where faith in a fact can help create the fact*, that would be an insane logic which should say that faith running ahead of scientific evidence is the "lowest kind of immorality" into which a thinking being can fall. In truths dependent on our personal action faith based on desire is certainly a lawful and possibly an indispensable thing.

B. STATEMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS HYPOTHESIS

But now, it will be said, these are all childish human cases, and have nothing to do with great cosmical matters, like the question of religious faith. Let us, then, pass on to that. Religions differ so much in their accidents that in discussing the religious question we must make it very generic and broad. What, then, do we now mean by the religious hypothesis?

Science says things are; morality says some things are better than other things; and religion says essentially two things.

First, she says that the best things are the more eternal things, the overlapping things, the things in the universe that throw the last stone, so to speak, and say the final word. "Perfection is eternal"—this phrase of Charles Secrétan seems a good way of putting this first affirmation of religion, an affirmation which obviously cannot yet be verified scientifically at all.

The second affirmation of religion is that we are better off even now if we believe her first affirmation to be true.

C. THE SKEPTIC'S LOGIC AMOUNTS TO AN UNPROVED PREFERENCE FOR A WORTHLESS RISK

Now, let us consider what the logical elements of this situation are *in case the religious hypotheses in both its branches be really true*. (Of course, we must admit the possibility at the outset. If we are to discuss the question at all, it must involve a *living* option. If for any of you religion be a hypothesis that cannot, by any living possibility be true, then you need go no farther. I speak to the "saving remnant" alone.) So proceeding, we see, first, that religion offers itself as a *momentous* option. We are supposed to gain, even now, by our belief, and to lose by our non-belief, a certain vital good.

Secondly, religion is a *forced* option, so far as that good goes. We cannot escape the issue by remaining skeptical and waiting for more light, because, although we do avoid error in that way *if religion be untrue*, we lose the good, *if it be true*, just as certainly as if we positively chose to disbelieve. It is as if a man should hesitate indefinitely to ask a certain woman to marry him because he was not perfectly sure that she would prove an angel after he brought her home. Would he not cut himself off from that particular angel-possibility as decisively as if he went and married some one else?

In Pascal's *Thoughts* there is a celebrated passage known in literature as Pascal's wager: You must either believe or not believe that God is—which will you do? Your human reason cannot say. A game is going on between you and the nature

of things which at the day of judgment will bring out either heads or tails. Weigh what your gains and your losses would be if you should stake all you have on heads, or God's existence: if you win in such a case, you gain eternal beatitude; if you lose, you lose nothing at all.

Skepticism, then, is not avoidance of option; it is option of a certain particular kind of risk. *Better risk loss of truth than chance of error*,—that is your faith-vetoer's exact position. He is backing the field against the religious hypothesis, just as the believer is backing the religious hypothesis against the field. To preach skepticism to us as a duty until "sufficient evidence" for religion be found, is tantamount, therefore, to telling us, when in presence of the religious hypothesis, that to yield to our fear of its being error is wiser and better than to yield to our hope that it may be true.

It is not intellect against all passions, then; it is only intellect with one passion laying down its law. And by what, forsooth, is the supreme wisdom of this passion warranted? Dupery for dupery, what proof is there that dupery through hope is so much worse than dupery through fear?

I, for one, can see no proof; and I simply refuse obedience to the scientist's command to imitate his kind of option, in a case where my own stake is important enough to give me the right to choose my own form of risk. If religion be true and the evidence for it be still insufficient, I do not wish, by putting your extinguisher upon my nature (which feels to me as if it had after all some business in this matter), to forfeit my sole chance in life of getting upon the winning side,—that chance depending, of course, on my willingness to run the risk of acting as if my passional need of taking the world religiously might be prophetic and right.

D. HOW THE AGNOSTIC'S ARGUMENT IS IRRATIONAL

All this is on the supposition that it really may be prophetic and right, and that, even to us who are discussing the matter, religion is a live hypothesis which may be true. Now, to most of us religion comes in a still further way that makes a veto on

our active faith even more illogical. The more perfect and more eternal aspect of the universe is represented in our religions as having personal form. The universe is no longer a mere *It* to us, but a *Thou*, if we are religious; and any relation that may be possible from person to person might be possible here. For instance, although in one sense we are passive portions of the universe, in another we show a curious autonomy, as if we were small active centers on our own account. We feel, too, as if the appeal of religion to us were made to our own active goodwill, as if evidence might be forever withheld from us unless we met the hypothesis half-way.

To take a trivial illustration: just as a man who in a company of gentlemen made no advances, asked a warrant for every concession, and believed no one's word without proof, would cut himself off by such churlishness from all the social rewards that a more trusting spirit would earn,—so here, one who should shut himself up in snarling logicality and try to make the gods extort his recognition willy-nilly, or not get it at all, might cut himself off forever from his only opportunity of making the god's acquaintance. This feeling, forced on us we know not whence, that by obstinately believing that there are gods (although not to do so would be so easy both for our logic and our life) we are doing the universe the 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*. That for me is the long and short of the formal logic of the situation, no matter what the kinds of truth might materially be.