A Comparative Study of the Development of the Notion of Concept in the Psychology and Philosophy of William James

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE NOTION OF CONCEPT IN THE
PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY
OF WILLIAM JAMES

by
Paul Vincent Robb, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
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Master of Arts

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LIFE

Paul Vincent Robb was born in Toledo, Ohio, July 15, 1928. He was graduated from Lincoln High School, Vincennes, Indiana, May 1946, and attended Vincennes University, a junior college affiliated with Purdue University, for one year.

In August, 1947, he entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus at Milford, Ohio, at which time he enrolled at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio. After two years of Novitiate, he spent two years studying Greek, Latin, history, and modern languages in the Juniorate at Milford. In June, 1951, he graduated from Xavier University with a Bachelor of Literature degree.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO WILLIAM JAMES

The purpose of this thesis is an exposition of William James's notion of concept as proposed in the Principles of Psychology and as developed, by James's adoption of radical empiricism, in Some Problems of Philosophy. The scope of the thesis will be confined to only two of the four general fields into which the writings of James fall: namely, the fields of psychology and of the philosophy of radical empiricism. Pragmatism will be included only in as much as it furthers the development of the notion of concept in radical empiricism. The fourth field, that of James's religious writings, has no direct significance on the thesis topic and will not be considered.

James's philosophical temperament and ideas cannot be understood properly, nor his difficulties and problems properly appreciated, without a brief orientation to his empirical background. It is necessary, therefore, to consider the ideas and the men who influenced William James.

James began his scientific studies at Harvard's Lawrence Scientific School in 1861 at the age of nineteen. His first interest was chemistry, but this soon turned to biology, physiology, and
medical studies. Forced by ill health to abandon his studies at Harvard, James went to Europe. Here, in between rest cures and medical aid, he tried to continue his physiology studies. At this time, too, he turned to psychology, as he wrote that "it seems to me that perhaps the time has come for psychology to begin to be a science, . . . I am going on to study what is already known, and perhaps may be able to do some work in it. Helmholtz and a man named Wundt at Heidelberg are working at it, and I hope I live through this winter to go to them in the summer."¹

When James graduated from Harvard with a medical degree in 1869, he had studied all the sciences then known that dealt with man in his physical and psychical make-up. But these studies had less personal influence on him than did his teachers. Two men, Jeffries Wyman, professor of comparative anatomy and physiology, and Louis Agassiz, professor of geology, James credits for their inspiration and help. These men created a scientific attitude at Harvard that was contemporary and prophetic, and it "was this eman­cipating influence, among all the forces of his time and place, that most deeply affected William James during the years of his university studies."² Such a background and the ingrained scientific approach of his teachers early committed James to an empiri-

¹Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James (Boston, 1935), II, 3.
²Ibid. I, 205.
cal approach to psychology and philosophy.\(^3\)

In 1872, James began his teaching career at Harvard as an instructor in anatomy and physiology. By now, however, his interests were in psychology, and in 1876 he organized the first psychological laboratory at Harvard. The success of this laboratory brought James the reputation of being one of America's leading psychologists, even though there was much dispute about the new physiological psychology he professed.\(^4\)

At this time James began to prepare the materials for his *Principles of Psychology*, which was not published until 1890. In this book he makes reference to the men who influenced him during these years. The doctrines of such men as Helmholtz, Wundt, Fechner, and Stumpf, of the German school; of Charcot and Janet of the French school; of Bain, Carpenter, J. S. Mill, Darwin, Taine, and Spencer, of the British group, figure prominently in James's psychology.\(^5\) The uniqueness and importance of James as the founder of American psychology stemmed from his ability to choose and pick what he thought good in the continental psychologists while adapting them into his own evolving system. Perry writes that "he benefitted by the new movements in German, French and English psy-

\(^3\)Ibid., 468.

\(^4\)Ibid., II, 6.

chology without surrendering himself wholly to any of them." 

Even at this time James's philosophical interests were beginning to absorb him. Among the men who influenced James, Perry says that Renouvier was "the greatest single influence upon James's thought; but though Renouvier was a professed adherent of Kant, James prized him for his Kantian heresies rather than for his fidelities." As a group, however, the British empiricists, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Mill, appeared to James as being "intellectually, as well as practically and morally, on the saner, sounder, and truer path." From the time James began to write the Principles, he was also in contact with philosophers in America and on the continent. His associations with Chauncey Wright, Charles S. Peirce, and Josiah Royce were very close. Of the philosophers on the continent James writes that he would not have been emancipated from many dilemmas he saw "if I had not been influenced by a comparatively young and very original French writer, Professor Henri Bergson."

With the ideas of a newly developed science in his mind and with the stimulation received from contact with minds of the past

6Perry, II, 6.
7Ibid., I, 465.
and present, James was encouraged and eager to test empiricism to see if he could use it to answer the problems he saw in philosophy. James saw the world as it presented itself to him in all its complexity, vitality, and concreteness. Continuity was one of the world's most striking characteristics which could not be overlooked. He constantly argued against those schools of thought which left the traditional chasms in the world unbridged or tried to bridge them with elaborate metaphysical constructions. Since he saw the world in all its fullness, he strove to find a principle of unity within the plurality that presented itself. He did not want a logical structure superimposed from without, but a common principle of unity within the world of his experience.

When, therefore, James began writing and teaching in psychology, he aimed at gathering all the data and information he could without correlating these within a philosophical framework. In the preface to the Principles, James says that the discussion of basic assumptions in psychology is metaphysical and is outside the purpose he intends. "This book," he writes, "assuming that thoughts and feelings exist and are vehicles of knowledge, thereupon contends that psychology, when she has ascertained the empirical correlation of the various sorts of thought or feeling with definite conditions of the brain, can go no farther--can go no farther that is, as a natural science. If she goes farther she

10Perry, Thought and Character, I, 460.
becomes metaphysical."  

With this view of psychology in mind, James rejected the associationist and spiritualist theories of psychology. The associationist assumption that sensations are the simplest mental facts is contrary, he thought, to the empirical method of investigation.  

James had some inclinations toward the spiritualist theory, but he determined to prescind from them. "If it does not strictly explain anything, it is at any rate less positively objectionable than either mind-stuff or a material-monad creed. The bare PHENOMENON, however, the IMMEDIATELY KNOWN thing which on the mental side is in opposition with the entire brain-process is the state of consciousness and not the soul itself."  

James, therefore, chose a strictly positivistic point of view which he admitted was anything but ultimate. However, he felt that all the facts must be gathered before any satisfactory metaphysical explanation could be had. His book "is mainly a mass of descriptive details, running out into queries which only a metaphysics alive to the weight of her task can hope successfully to deal with."  

From James's considerations during the writing of the Principles we can see that philosophy was his ultimate goal. He could

11William James, The Principles of Psychology (New York, 1890), I, vi.
12Ibid., 224.
13Ibid., 182.
14Ibid., vi.
not rest with a merely scientific psychology. In the epilogue to his Psychology, the briefer course, published in 1892, James discussed psychology and philosophy. Here he again admits the inability of psychology as a natural science to give ultimate answers. Here, too, he posed the problems that would force him to develop a philosophy of his own. He felt that "the metaphysical puzzles become the most urgent ones of all. Psychology contributes her full share of these; and I propose in this last chapter to indicate briefly which of them seem the more important." 15

These problems involve the correspondence of two mutually distinct realities such as we have in the relationship of knower and known, thought and thing, concept and percept. In his Psychology James adopted psycho-physical parallelism as a working hypothesis to serve psychology as a natural science. He admitted, however, when he considered the philosophical implications, that the correspondence of the entire state of the brain to a unique state of the mind "does very well till we begin to be metaphysical and ask ourselves just what we mean by such a word as 'corresponds.'" 16 James's problems, therefore, become congruent in an effort to explain this correspondence, this union of distinct realities. His problem becomes one of finding a unifying principle for subject and object, thought and thing, concept and percept, in the

16Ibid.
knower-known relationship. In other words, a subject has thoughts and concepts, the object is a thing thought and a percept conceived, how can these dualities be unified in a basic common reality?

From this statement of James's general problem, it is clear that the specific problem of this thesis, James's notion of concept, is a part of his wider problem. Here the problem is of correspondence between concepts, which are discontinuous, immutable, and eternal, and the constantly changing, continuous flow of experience. How can these distinct realities be unified? In the exposition of James's notion of concept, therefore, it will be necessary to touch on his solution of the broader problem.

In the division of this thesis the second chapter will discuss James's analysis of the elements of consciousness in the stream of thought. From this analysis arises, for James, the possibility of knowledge. Following this necessary orientation, the concept as a particular type of knowledge will be presented and developed. This chapter will consider James's notion of concept from the vantage point of psychology. The third chapter will deal with the formulation and development of radical empiricism's philosophy of pure experience as the unifying principle which James proposed as the solution to the general problem, and to the problem of the perceptual and conceptual worlds. Pragmatism will be discussed as a special feature of radical empiricism in regard to the meaning and truth of concepts. A discussion of how pure experience solves the problems of the concept and enriches the no-
tion of concept will be the matter of the fourth chapter. Some general conclusions, considerations, and comparisons with scholastic notions of concept will make up the fifth and final chapter.
CHAPTER II

CONCEPT AS FOUND AND DEVELOPED IN THE PRINCIPLES

In the Principles, as we indicated in the first chapter, James proposed to treat psychology as a natural science which "assumes as its data 1) thoughts and feelings, and 2) a physical world in time and space with which they coexist and which 3) they know."¹ These three are the facts of mental life that James will deal with in his study of psychology. There are, however, other hypotheses which James postulates as useful for the full understanding of the intricate workings of finite mental activity.

James's first hypothesis considered man's mental faculties as instruments adapted to secure safety and prosperity in the complexity of the world. The consequent interaction resulting between the world and man's conscious activity brought James to an opinion, which shows Darwin's influence, that "mind and world . . . have been evolved together, and in consequence are something of a mutual fit."² The chief result of this evolutionary view of mental

¹William James, The Principles of Psychology (New York, 1890), I, vi.
²William James, Psychology, ed. Ralph Barton Perry (Cleveland, 1948), p. 4.
life is "the gradually growing conviction that mental life is primarily teleological; that is to say, that our various ways of feeling and thinking have grown to be what they are because of their utility in shaping our reactions on the outer world."^3

A second hypothesis which James postulated for himself in writing the Principles was "that mental action may be uniformly and absolutely a function of brain-action, varying as the latter varies, and being to the brain-action as effect to cause."^4 This last hypothesis is fundamental to the physiological psychology for which James had been preparing himself for years.

Even though James admitted that these two postulates were only working hypotheses, and although he adapted and limited them over the years, his empiricism forced him to treat these postulates as facts of experience. In fact, much of James's later philosophizing was an attempt to fit the facts of common sense experience into the framework of these hypotheses, despite his protestation that he wished to avoid all artificial frameworks.

Before James began his formal study of the elements of consciousness and intellection, he made a few observations on the mind as an object in a world of other objects that has relationships with these other objects. Even though James, the psychologist, considered the relation of knowing to be "the most mysteri-

^3Ibid.
^4Ibid., 6.
ous thing in the world, it is an ultimate relation that must be admitted whether it be explained or not." Therefore, the psychologist's attitude toward cognition must be a complete dualism which supposes two elements, mind knowing and thing known, and he must treat them as irreducible. Thus, "the dualism of Object and Subject and their pre-established harmony are what the psychologist as such must assume, whatever ulterior monistic philosophy he may, as an individual who has the right to be a metaphysician, have in reserve." 6

James began his psychology of intellection with an introspective analysis of the elements of consciousness. This analysis gave rise to his stream of consciousness, which was one of James's original contributions to psychology. Much of the data presented in this analysis had been gathered over the years and had been published in outline form in 1884 in an article entitled "On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology."

Before beginning his analysis, James looked for the primary datum of experience. He thought he found this elementary fact in the "concrete fact which every one will affirm to belong to his inner experience, . . . the fact that consciousness of some sort goes on. 'States of mind' succeed each other in him. If we could say in English 'it thinks,' . . . we should be stating the

5James, Principles I, 216.
6Ibid., 220.
fact most simply and with the minimum of assumption."

Proceeding empirically in his analysis, James noted five characteristics of the process of thought: that every thought seems to be part of a personal consciousness; that thought is always changing within each personal consciousness; that thought is sensibly continuous within each personal consciousness; that thought deals with objects independent of itself; that thought, finally, is interested in some parts of its objects to the exclusion of other parts.

Taking up the first point, James writes that "it seems as if the elementary psychic fact were not thought or this thought or that thought, but my thought, every thought being owned." This psychic fact brings men to admit a personal mind or self whose existence cannot be questioned. This personal self is not a permanent substance underlying thought. It is nothing essentially different from anything to be found in the procession of changing thoughts.

James's second characteristic of thought is that "no state once gone can recur and be identical with what it was before."
In other words, the same sensation once had can never be felt again. If there seems to be a sameness in two different states of consciousness, this does not come from the sensation repeated, but from the same object gotten twice.\^12

This is true, because, on introspection, the same sensation is not quite the same as it was before. The same object may be sensed, but the new relations and context change, to some degree, the original sensation. This follows from the assumption that every sensation corresponds to some cerebral action. Since the brain is being constantly modified, there must be a corresponding change in the concomitant sensation.\^13 Each new state of the brain is determined by the states that have preceded it; so this growing modification makes identical sensations impossible. James concluded, therefore, that "experience is remoulding us every moment, and our mental reaction on every given thing is really a resultant of our experience of the whole world up to that date."\^14

It is this theory of experience, based on physiological data, that made it impossible for James to follow either Locke or Herbert, who "formulate the mental facts in an atomistic sort of way, and treat the higher states of consciousness as if they were all built out of unchanging ideas... These ideas are as mytho-

\^12Ibid., 231.
\^13Ibid., 233.
\^14Ibid., 236.
logical an entity as the Jack of Spades."\textsuperscript{15} If psychologists do not analyze the elements of consciousness, but assume this atomistic viewpoint, the result "is the Human doctrine that our thought is composed of separate independent parts and is not a sensibly continuous stream."\textsuperscript{16}

James begins his analysis of the third characteristic of thought by defining "'continuous' as that which is without breach, crack or division."\textsuperscript{17} Introspection reveals two types of breaks in thought. There could be time-gaps between states of consciousness, for example, the lapse of consciousness during sleep. Or there could be a qualitative break so strong that two succeeding states of consciousness had no connection whatever. But introspection also reveals two things about these breaks: "1. That even where there is a time-gap the consciousness after it feels as if it belonged together with the consciousness before it, as another part of the same self; 2. That the changes from one moment to another in the quality of the consciousness are never absolutely abrupt."\textsuperscript{18}

In analyzing the first of the two breaks, the time-gap, James recognized the fact that, though consciousness is broken, it is

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 236.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 237.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
not broken so completely that there is a new self who cannot remember a past existence. This unity amid sensibly continuous consciousness James attributed to the unity of a common self:

This community of self is what the time-gap cannot break in twain, and is why a present thought, although not ignorant of the time-gap, can still regard itself as continuous with certain chosen portions of the past.

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.19

Those who would claim that the second type of break in continuity, the sudden contrasts in the quality of thought, so alters consciousness that it is completely different are guilty of confusion, or of "a superficial introspective view."20 The confusion here is between the thoughts themselves, which, taken as subjective facts, are continuous, and the things, which are discrete and discontinuous. "The transition between the thought of one object and the thought of another is no more a break in the thought than a joint in a bamboo is a break in the wood. It is part of the consciousness as much as the joint is part of the bamboo."21

No matter how violent the change of thought nor how complete-

19Ibid., 239.
20Ibid., 240.
21Ibid.
ly different the termini of the thought, the change is gradual. This is true because "as the total neurosis changes, so does the total psychosis change. But as the changes of neurosis are never absolutely discontinuous, so must the successive psychoses shade gradually into each other, although their rate of change may be much faster at one moment than at the next."22 The superficial introspective view has overlooked the affinities that are present between different thoughts. Even our language works against us here for "we name our thoughts simply, each after its thing, as if each knew its own thing and nothing else. What each really knows is clearly the thing it is named for, with dimly perhaps a thousand other things."23

This insight is a flash of James's genius, and one of his primary contributions to the analysis of consciousness. This insight led James to two considerations which were important for his psychology of thought, and consequently of conception. These two considerations are: (1) the transitive and substantive parts of consciousness, and (2) the fringe of consciousness. Each of these will be taken up and developed in turn.

James, analyzing the thought process, compared it with the flight of a bird made of "an alternation of flights and perchings."24

22Ibid., 243.
23Ibid., 241.
24Ibid., 243.
He described this more fully when he wrote that "the resting-places are usually occupied by sensorial imaginations of some sort, whose peculiarity is that they can be held before the mind for an indefinite time, and contemplated without changing; the places of flight are filled with thoughts of relations, static or dynamic, that for the most part obtain between the matter contemplated in the periods of comparative rest." Substantive parts is the name given to the resting-places, and the places of flight are called the transitive parts of the stream.

It is almost impossible to recognize these transitive parts of the stream from introspection. The process of thought usually rushes on to the substantive parts so quickly that the transitive parts cannot be focused on. If the psychologist succeeds in isolating a transitive part, in that very act it becomes a substantive part.

Because of this inability to find the transitive parts of the stream through introspection, the sensationalists and intellectualists denied their existence. The sensationalists, unable to discover any feelings corresponding to the relations and forms of connection in the world, denied that feelings of relation exist. Hume even went so far as to deny that there are any relations out of the mind. The intellectualists, on the other hand, could not deny the reality of these external relations, but they

\[25\text{Ibid.}\]
could not point out any distinct relations actually existing. So they, too, denied that these feelings of relations exist. 26

James's reaction to these erroneous positions was a strong affirmation that "if there be such things as feelings at all, then so surely as relations between objects exist in rerum natura, so surely, and more surely, do feelings exist to which these relations are known." 27 James had named these swift motions of consciousness transitive states and compared their continuity to that of the brain. "As the brain-changes are continuous, so do all these consciousnesses melt into each other like dissolving views. Properly they are but one protracted consciousness, one unbroken stream." 28

There is another type of unnamed "state of consciousness" which is just as important and just as cognitive as the transitive states, and just as much unrecognized by traditional psychologies. As an example of this second, unnamed state, James considered the effort to recall a forgotten name. There is a gap that is to be overcome, but it is a gap which is intensely active. The effort to recall, the false starts, the name on the tip-of-the-tongue are signs of this activity. This activity led James to consider that "the feeling of an absence is toto coelo other than the absence

26Ibid., 244-245.
27Ibid., 245.
28Ibid., 247-248.
of a feeling."\(^{29}\)

It is this feeling, activity, or tendency that James considered so important. Because consciousness is continuous, no one part of it can be in complete isolation from the rest. Each element of consciousness contains in itself a retrospective and a prospective tendency. In the present analysis James is discussing the importance of this tendency.

This second, unnamed state is directional. It consists of psychic transitions whose function is to lead from one set of images to another. Because of its transitory character, just as that of the transitive states, it is lost in introspection. But it is none the less real. In fact, a good part of our psychic life consists in such rapid premonitory perspective views of schemes of thought not yet articulate.\(^{30}\)

These "feelings of tendency," as James called them, are often vague, but they are part of a picture of mental life which is more correct than that of psychologists who deny any except perfectly distinct images. James described his own position in contrast with the traditional one when he wrote that:

The traditional psychology talks like one who should say a river consists of nothing but pailsful, spoonsful, quartpotsful, barrelsful, and other moulded forms of water. Even were the pails and the pots all actually standing in the stream, still between them flows the free water of consciousness that psychologists resolve-

\(^{29}\)Ibid., 252.

\(^{30}\)Ibid., 253.
ly overlook. Every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows round it. With it goes the sense of its relations, near and remote, the dying echo of whence it came to us, the dawning sense of whither it is to lead. The significance, the value, of the image is all in this halo or penumbra that surrounds and escorts it, --or rather that is fused into one with it and has become bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh; leaving it, it is true, an image of the same thing it was before, but making it an image of that thing newly taken and freshly understood.31

James's psycho-physical hypothesis led him to believe that there was a corresponding physical reaction to this psychic phenomenon. Therefore he named this state of consciousness a "psychic overtone," or a "fringe," in order "to designate the influence of a faint brain-process upon our thought, as it makes it aware of relations and objects but dimly perceived."32

James goes on to list four important characteristics of this notion of the fringe of consciousness. The first of these is that there is a reason for the distinction between knowledge of acquaintance and knowledge-about. The fringe is what distinguishes these two types of knowledge. When the fringe is present, knowledge is more complete. This complete, knowledge-about is knowledge of the relations of a thing, and these are only found in the fringe.33 This awareness of the object's relations, as James states, comes only in the "penumbral nascent way of a 'fringe' of unarticulated

31Ibid., 255.
32Ibid., 258.
33Ibid., 259.
This sense of affinity is a second feature of the stream of thought derived from the notion of the fringe. In all thinking there is some topic or subject about which the members of the thought revolve. The relation of the other members to the topic is felt in the fringe, and particularly the relation of harmony and discord, of furtherance or hindrance of the topic. If the relation is harmonious, it positively furthers the thought; if discordant, it initiates or continues the search for harmonious relations. If these relations lead us to the conclusion of a train of thought, there is "meaning, or, as we say, the topic of thought." Since meaning is the most important part of the stream, the various relations used to reach it are relatively unimportant.

From this notion of meaning James formulated his idea that thinking is only a teleological instrument. "The reader sees by this time that it makes little or no difference in what sort of mind-stuff, in what quality of imagery, his thinking goes on. The only images intrinsically important are the halting-places, the substantive conclusions, provisional or final, of the thought. Throughout all the rest of the stream, the feelings of relations are everything, and the terms related almost naught. These feel-

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34Ibid.
36Ibid., 259-260.
nings of relation, these psychic overtones, halos, suffusions, or fringes about the terms may be the same in very different systems of imagery."37

With the notions of the transitive states and the fringe, James explains "the sensible continuity and unity of our thought as contrasted with the apparent discreteness of the words, images, and other means by which it seems to be carried on. Between all their substantive elements there is 'transitive' consciousness, and the words and images are 'fringed,' and not as discrete as to a careless view they may seem."38

The amount of space James gives to the explanation of thought as sensibly continuous warrants the detailed analysis given above. Also, what has been discussed above is the groundwork for a more complete discussion of the concept.

The fourth characteristic James attributed to human thought is that it appears to deal with objects independent of itself. Our common sense leads us to accept the extra-mental existence of the objects of our mind because we perceive that "there are many human thoughts, each with the same objects."39 In connection with knowledge of objects independent of the mind, James discusses two erroneous opinions prevalent at the time. The first is "that the

37Ibid., 269.
38Ibid., 271.
39Ibid.
reflective consciousness of the self is essential to the cognitive function of thought." In other words, the mind, in order to know, must expressly distinguish between the things which it knows and itself. James denied this consciousness as essential to thought, then added that "thought may, but need not, in knowing, discriminate between its object and itself."

James also objected to those who misuse the word "object," and take it to indicate only the "substantive kernel or nucleus of the consciousness." For example, in the sentence "Columbus discovered America in 1492," most people would say that the object of the mind is the word "Columbus," or "America," or "discovered." James maintained that it was none of these, but the entire sentence or context. To get the proper object, each word of a sentence must be considered with its fringed relations. "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, and however symbolic the manner of the thinking may be." Even if the object is complex, the thought of it is one undivided state of consciousness. James argued against the asso-

40 Ibid., 274.
41 Ibid., 275.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 276.
ciationists who try to reach a unity out of the elementary distinct ideas. There was a foreshadowing of gestalt psychology present when James insisted that "whatever things are thought in relation are thought from the outset in a unity, in a single pulse of subjectivity, a single psychosis, feeling, or state of mind." This unity of the entire thought is present in each word of the sentence. Though each word is discrete, the fringe of the word as spoken in the sentence continues the unity of meaning. "No word in an understood sentence comes to consciousness as a mere noise. We feel its meaning as it passes; and although our object differs from one moment to another as to its verbal kernel or nucleus, yet it is similar throughout the entire segment of the stream." The reason for this unity lies in the consubstantiality of the individual words and the entire meaning. "They are made of the same 'mind stuff,' and form an unbroken stream." The fifth and final characteristic of the stream is that "it is always interested more in one part of its object than in another, and welcomes and rejects, or chooses, all the while it thinks." Just as each sensation is selected from an "undistinguishable, swarming continuum, devoid of distinction or emphatic..."
sis, by our sense organs, so the mind chooses to suit itself, and decides what particular sensation shall be held more real and valid than all the rest. The mind works on the matter of thought, the chaos of sensations, as a sculptor works on a statue. "The world we feel and live in will be that which our ancestors and we, by slowly cumulative strokes of choice, have extricated out of this, like sculptors, by simply rejecting certain portions of the given stuff."49

James's analysis of thought in the stream of consciousness has been developed at some length. This is important for the purpose of this thesis, because consciousness is the basic element of all thought. From his analysis of thinking James concluded to the possibility of knowledge.

The possibility of knowledge is a fundamental psychic peculiarity which James named "the principle of constancy in the mind's meanings," and which may be thus expressed: 'The same matters can be thought of in successive portions of the mental stream, and some of these portions can know that they mean the same matters which the other portions meant.'50 James insisted that this is a psychological principle which the mind may use whether there be any real sameness in things or not. As far as mental life goes,

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 289.
50 Ibid., 459.
however, "this sense of sameness is the very keel and backbone of our thinking."51

Once James has explained the possibility of knowledge in the stream by the identification of two thoughts as the same, he has set the stage for a discussion of two general types of knowledge of which men are conscious, "knowledge of acquaintance and knowledge-about."52 Knowledge of acquaintance is superficial. It is a passing knowledge, a knowledge which knows that an object is present, but not what it is. Knowledge-about is deeper and more complete. It knows the what of an object as well as the that. James looked on knowledge of acquaintance as the beginning of cognition, and knowledge-about as its completion. Knowledge-about is gotten through analysis of and concentration on the fringe relations of the subject. The thoughts arising from knowledge-about are concepts. Knowledge of acquaintance, on the other hand, is akin to sensation or perception, and is the knowledge more proper to the stream. Thus, James contended that "all the elementary natures of the world, together with the kinds of relation that subsist between them, must either not be known at all, or known in this dumb way of acquaintance without knowledge-about."53

James's empiricism, according to Perry, led him to consider

51Ibid.
52Ibid., 221.
53Ibid., 221-222; also, cf. above pp. 19-20.
human experience as narrower than human knowledge. Thus, knowledge of acquaintance is within experience, and knowledge-about passes beyond experience. Perry points to James's contention that "while both kinds of knowledge are indispensable, knowledge by acquaintance is completer and more conclusive than knowledge-about, the latter being a substitute or adjunct which is required in order to overcome the limited range of the former." 54

James's detailed analysis of consciousness presented the elements common to thought and the groundwork of knowledge. From this analysis he explained how knowledge could arise through the principle of constancy in the mind's meanings. After his discussion of two general types of knowledge, James is prepared to discuss one particular type, knowledge-about, or concept.

James defines conception as "the function by which we thus identify a numerically distinct and permanent subject of discourse." 55 The subject of discourse, therefore, becomes numerically distinct and permanent when it is marked off from, or singled out of, the world of complex experience. James preferred the word conception to concept. For his, concepts were the thoughts which are the vehicles of conception, but they were not the objects of the discourse. "The word 'conception,'" he wrote, "is unambiguous. It properly denotes neither the mental state nor what the mental

55 James, Principles I, p. 461.
state signifies, but the relation between the two, namely, the function of the mental state in signifying just that particular thing. Once James has defined conception, he discusses its properties and characteristics.

The first property of conception is its uniqueness. It is of one thing and "nothing else—nothing else, that is, instead of that, though it may be of much else in addition to that." Attention singles out and identifies one element from the multiplicity of the stream. It focuses on the nucleus or kernel of the thought, and prescinds, as much as possible, from the surrounding fringe. Since there must be some positive identification of the object, some distinguishing mark, the essential point of conception is that an object so singled out "should be re-identified by us as that which the talk is about; and no full representation of it is necessary for this, even when it is a fully representable thing."

Because the concept is isolated from the stream of thought, it remains eternally what it is and can never change. This is the second property of the concept. The mind may change states and

56 Ibid., 461. In Some Problems of Philosophy, p. 48, James says he uses synonyms for the words concept and percept. "'Idea,' 'thought,' and 'intellection' are synonymous with 'concept.' Instead of 'percept' I shall often speak of 'sensation,' 'feeling,' 'intuition,' and sometimes of 'sensible experience' or of the 'immediate flow' of conscious life."

57 James, Principles I, 461.

58 Ibid., 463.
its meanings, at various times, but "the world of conceptions, or things intended to be thought about, stands stiff and immutable, like Plato's Realm of Ideas."59

No one can deny that knowledge grows and changes, but James thought that those psychologists who claim that concepts evolve from within were incorrect. He thought that concepts did not grow, but knowledge grows with new concepts. When a concept is present, it may suggest or instigate a new act of attention which will result in a new concept. New concepts, however, do not evolve from older concepts, they "come from new sensations, new movements, new emotions, new associations, new acts of attention, and new comparisons of old conceptions, and not in other ways."60 The reason for this unchangeableness of conception is to be found in the very nature of concepts. Being singled out of perceptual experience and marked off from their context, "they form an essentially discontinuous system, and translate the process of our perceptual experience, which is naturally a flux, into a set of stagnant and petrified terms."61

A third property of conception deals with a peculiar element of thought--the sense of meaning. The meaning of a conception does not consist in the isolated meaning of one word, the nucleus

59 Ibid., 462.
60 Ibid., 467.
61 Ibid., 467-468.
or kernel. It has to do with every word expressing the entire conception, and each word must be considered with all its fringed relations. 62 Thus, when the word man is used in two different sentences, two entirely different things may be meant. When the sentence refers to an individual, as "What a wonderful man Jones is!", all other individual men are excluded. However, when the sentence is, "What a wonderful thing Man is!", there is no such exclusion. The reason for this exclusion and inclusion is to be found in the fringe of the word man. The fringed relations of this conception, man, may apply to all men, to some men, or to one man, depending on what part of the fringe is admitted into the sense of meaning of the word man in a particular context. This fringe is an added consciousness to the mere nucleus of the word man. It "is an absolutely positive sort of feeling, transforming what would otherwise be mere noise or vision into something understood; and determining the sequel of my thinking, the later words and images, in a perfectly definite way."63 The presence of the fringe is an integral part of the mind's object and leads us to universals and to abstract ideas.

James began his discussion of abstract ideas with a rejection of Berkeley's nominalistic position. He claimed that man's common mental experience of abstract ideas argued decisively

62 James, Psychology, p. 240. Cf also above pp. 20-23.
63 Ibid., 241.
against Berkeley. James aligned himself with the conceptualistic doctrine of John Stuart Mill, though he was not in entire agreement with it. An abstract idea, according to Mill, does not arise from the abstraction of one attribute from others, but from attention fixed on one attribute to the exclusion of others. Thus, there are no general concepts, properly speaking, but only complex concepts of objects in the concrete. Through concentration of attention, man is able to conceive certain concepts as if they were separated from the rest. James emphasized this latter notion that "while the concentration of attention lasts, if it is sufficiently intense, we may be temporarily unconscious of any of the other attributes, and may really, for a brief interval, have nothing present to our mind but the attributes constituent of the concept." If there be a better description extant," James added, "of a mind in possession of an 'abstract idea,' than is contained in the words I have italicized, I am unacquainted with it."64

Though James sided with the conceptualists, he could not go along with the entire doctrine of Mill. He rejected Mill's notion "that a thought must be what it means, and mean what it is, and that if it be a picture of an entire individual, it cannot mean any part of him to the exclusion of the rest."65 James's rejection of this doctrine is based on his distinction between the total object

64James, Principles I, 470.
65Ibid., 471.
of thought and the topic, or kernel, or nucleus, of the thought. The total object consists of each word expressing the entire thought together with its fringed relations, whereas the topic of thought is the main subject of the entire discourse.

When applied to abstract ideas, James's notions of the fringe and the topic of thought take on added importance. James contended "that the image per se, the nucleus, is functionally the least important part of the thought." The important part is the entire context of the thought, which includes the fringed relations. These fringes are tendencies leading us back to the original context of the thought in the stream of consciousness. Therefore:

all that a state of mind need do, in order to take cognizance of a reality, intend it, or be 'about' it, is to lead to a remoter state of mind which either acts upon the reality or resembles it. The only class of thoughts which can with any show of plausibility be said to resemble their objects are sensations. The stuff of which all our other thoughts are composed is symbolic, and a thought attests its pertinency to a topic by simply terminating, sooner or later, in a sensation which resembles the latter.

Thus, when concentrated attention singles a conception out of the stream of consciousness, this conception is an abstract idea, but it does not have to be an exact duplicate of what it knows. It is sufficient if that conception leads the knower to an exper-

66Ibid. Cf. also above, pp. 22-23.
67Ibid., 472.
68Ibid., 471.
ience that resembles the first experience from which it was taken. So James decided, with reservation, in favor of the conceptualist's position on abstract ideas and affirmed "that the power to think things, qualities, relations, or whatever other elements there may be, isolated and abstracted from the total experience in which they appear, is the most indisputable function of our thought."69

An abstract idea was generally thought to be a universal, but, for James, an abstract idea is neither universal nor particular. Before it is applied to an individual or to a class of objects, it is nothing but "a 'that,' a 'floating adjective.' . . . Properly it is, in this state, a singular--I have 'singled it out.'"70

When the abstract concept is applied to a class, there is a new conception--that of applying. The new conception has nothing to do with any change, however, in the topic or nucleus of the thought, but solely with the vague consciousness that surrounds the nucleus. James felt he had discussed this vague consciousness sufficiently when he analyzed the fringe and the topic of thought. Thus a universal arises when the mind spreads its attention out from the nucleus of the thought to the fringed relations. If these relations are considered as they affect an entire class, the conception is universal. If the relation is confined to one individual, the conception is particular. To distinguish abstract and universal

69Ibid., 472-473.
70Ibid., 473.
ideas we might use the examples of a sphere. The exact center of the sphere, prescinded from every other part, is the abstract. When attention reaches out to the radii going from the center to the surface of the sphere, the abstract idea becomes universal if all the radii are considered, or particular if only one radius is attended to.\footnote{Ibid.}

In discussing universals, James rejected both nominalism and conceptualism. He found it "impossible to tell, in all the whirl about universal and particular, when the author is talking about universals in the mind, and when about objective universals, so strangely are the two mixed together."\footnote{Ibid., 475.} James's reaction to the whole controversy was that "this is nonsense. An idea neither is what it knows, nor knows what it is; nor will swarms of copies of the same 'idea,' recurring in stereotyped form, or 'by the irresistible laws of association formed into one idea,' ever be the same thing as a thought of 'all the possible members' of a class."\footnote{Ibid., 477.}

James looked for an explanation of the universal in his analysis of consciousness. He found his explanation in the fringe, as we explained on the preceding page. James admitted, however, that, if these "swarms," postulated by the nominalists, could be translated into cerebral terms and thus made to stand for something
real, this opinion would be less hollow than the conceptualist opinion. He thought this translation could take place "if each 'idea' stands for some special nascent nerve-process, then the aggregate of these nascent processes might have for its conscious correlate a psychic 'fringe,' which should be just that universal meaning, or intention that the name or mental picture employed should mean all the possible individuals of the class."74

James felt, however, that the whole controversy was an insignificant detail in the face of the fact that the mind works with universals, no matter what they may be. He concluded that "our meanings are of singulare, particulars, indefinites, and universals mixed together in every way. A singular individual is as much conceived when he is isolated and identified away from the rest of the world in my mind, as is the most rarefied and universally applicable quality he may possess--being, for example, when treated in the same way."75 The only value of universals, therefore, is that they help us to know new truths about individual things, and "the traditional universal-worship can only be called a bit of perverse sentimentalism, a philosophic 'idol of the cave.'"76

Once he had resolved for himself the problems of abstract and universal ideas, James turned to a discussion of the purpose of

74Ibid.
75Ibid., 479.
76Ibid., 480.
conception. He began by restating the second characteristic analyzed from consciousness: "nothing can be conceived twice over without being conceived in entirely different states of mind." James held that the essence of conception is that a second thought is reidentified as the same as a previous thought in the stream of consciousness. When an object is conceived twice or more times, however, the notion of "twice," or "more times," is an added note. "As a matter of fact, the thoughts by which we know that we mean the same thing are apt to be very different indeed from each other. We think the thing now in one context, now in another; now in a definite image, now in a symbol. Sometimes our sense of its identity pertains to the mere fringe, sometimes it involves the nucleus of our thought." Thus, because the mind is constantly in different states—growing and evolving with knowledge it constantly receives,—each new conception of the same object is a little different than the previous conception.

In this notion of the evaluation of thought, James has two seemingly contradictory elements. He speaks of conception as depending on sameness, yet he states that two conceptions can never be the same. He resolves this problem by distinguishing the essence and the purpose of conception.

Though the essence of conception consists in the continuity

77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
and permanency of the topic of a thought, the purpose of conception comes from the mind's operating on the thought. The mind alters, improves, and substitutes one predicate for another without ever letting the subject change. "This," James remarks, "is what is meant when it is said that thinking consists in making judgments." 79

In making judgments all sorts of new results are brought out. The entire process might be reduced to merely having the topic, then operating on it through judgments, and finally having it again in a richer and truer way. Thus, in the end "a compound conception has been substituted for the simple one, but with full consciousness that both are of the same." 80

This enrichment of the concept comes from the fact that consciousness and the mind are always changing and evolving. When the mind operates on the data given to sense, it transforms the order in which experience comes into an entirely different order, that of the conceived world. James contrasted the conceptual order to a sieve in which a man tries to gather up the world's contents, however:

Most facts and relations fall through its meshes, being either too subtle or insignificant to be fixed in any conception. But whenever a physical reality is caught and identified as the same with something already conceived, it remains on the sieve, and all the predicates and relations of the conception with which it is identified become its predicates and relations too; it is subjected to the sieve's network, in other words.

79 Ibid., 481.
80 Ibid.
Thus comes to pass what Mr. Hodgson calls the translation of the perceptual into the conceptual order of the world. 81

This notion of transformation led James to consider the ultimate purpose of conception. Conception "is really nothing but a teleological instrument. This whole function of conceiving, of fixing, and holding fast to meanings, has no significance apart from the fact that the conceiving is a creature with partial purposes and private ends." 82

This teleological notion of James can be found in his earliest writings. In an article, published in 1879, he says that the quest in philosophy is a search for a conception. This he described as "a teleological instrument. It is a partial aspect of a thing which for our purpose we regard as its essential aspect, as the representative of the entire thing. . . . the essence, the ground of conception, varies with the end we have in view." 83

James adopted this teleological aspect, this dependence of conception on the will of the knower, because "no concept can be a valid substitute for a concrete reality except with reference to a particular interest in the conceiving. . . . The only virtue . . . conception need have is simplicity, and a simple conception is an equivalent for the world only so far as the world is simple; the

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81 Ibid., 482.
82 Ibid.
world meanwhile, whatever simplicity it may harbour, being also a
mightily complex affair."84

James developed the idea of conception as teleological when
he discussed it as a part of the reasoning process. Reasoning, for
James, was the substitution of abstract properties for a concrete
object. Conception gives us these properties; thereby it becomes
part of the process.

In conception only one out of many possible properties of an
object is singled out and attended to. Since the object has many
properties, any one of these could be conceived; but whichever
property is singled out is just as true as any that has been ne­
glected. James concluded, therefore, that "all ways of conceiving
a concrete fact, if they are true ways at all, are equally true
ways. There is no property ABSOLUTELY essential to any one thing."85

Therefore, there is no injustice in attributing only one property
to an object to the exclusion of others. Moreover, there is an
excuse for this mode of conceiving: "My excuse is necessity--the
necessity which my finite and practical nature lays on me. My
thinking is first and last and always for the sake of my doing,
and I can do only one thing at a time."86

James admitted that this notion of practicality was against

84Ibid., 123.
85Ibid.
86James, Principles, II, 333.
the common-sense and scholastic notions, which contend that there is one thing absolutely proper to an object--its essence. But James insisted that "the only meaning of essence is teleological, and that classification and conception are purely teleological weapons of the mind. The essence of a thing is that one of its properties which is so important for my interests that in comparison with it I may neglect the rest."87

In an article, "Reflex Action and Theism," written in 1881, James discussed what he meant by conception being an instrument for private ends. Mind is committed to be a teleological mechanism, he thought, because of the reflex theory of action. This theory means:

that the acts we perform are always the result of outward discharges from the nervous centres, and that these outward discharges are themselves the result of impressions from the external world, carried in along one or another of our sensory nerves. . . . The structural unit of the nervous system is in fact a triad, neither of whose elements has any independent existence. The sensory impression exists only for the sake of awaking the central process of reflection, and the central process of reflection exists only for the sake of calling forth the final act. All action is thus re-action upon the outer world; and the middle stage of consideration or contemplation or thinking is only a place of transit, the bottom of the loop, both of whose ends have their point of application in the outer world.88

Thus, the thinking faculty "functions exclusively for the sake of ends that do not exist at all in the world of impressions . . .

87Ibid., 335.
but are set by our emotional and practical subjectivity altogether." The thinking faculty transforms the data received from the sense world into a conceived order, and the transformation is affected by the interests of man's volitional nature.

James was forced to call on man's volitional nature to direct the transformation of the perceived world into the conceived world, because he thought that man had "no organ or faculty to appreciate the simply given order." Since man cannot appreciate the given order, he must break its complexity and multiplicity into parts and remodel it in his mind. That this is the proper way of handling the given order is "the miracle of miracles, a miracle not yet exhaustively cleared up by any philosophy, . . . that the given order lends itself to remodeling."91

There was, James thought, an element in all things that was beyond the reach of man's mind. Since man has to deal with all things, there must be some way, besides the time, to remodel the given order. Another faculty must be called in to direct the remodeling. This faculty is the will. James considered this the higher faculty, and through its response to the nature of things man has the best communication he can have with the world. Therefore, man's cognitive faculty is subordinated to his volitional

89Ibid., 115.
90Ibid., 118.
91Ibid., 119.
faculty. James summarized his ideas with the thought that "in every being that is real there is something external to, and sacred from, the grasp of every other. God's being is sacred from ours. To co-operate with his creation by the best and rightest response seems all he wants of us. In such co-operation with his purposes . . . must lie the real meaning of our destiny."92

In this chapter we have discussed James's psychological notion of concept. To see the concept in proper perspective, it was necessary to discuss the stream of consciousness from which the concept arises and of whose elements the concept partakes. Through a discussion of the characteristics, properties, and teleological value and purpose of the concept, we have arrived at the fullblown notion of concept which James had evolved when he finished the Principles in 1890. There were problems, however, which had sprung up during the writing of the Principles and which James put aside until he could think them through more thoroughly. Now we must consider the philosophy he devised as an explanation of and solution to these problems.

92Ibid., 141.
CHAPTER III

RADICAL EMPIRICISM: A SOLUTION TO SOME PROBLEMS

When James finished the Principles, he felt he had presented the facts and data of mental life and activity. However, the problem of how knowledge was possible at all still concerned him. He knew from his studies and experiments that men know, but he did not know how two irreducible realities, knower and known, could be joined in the knower-known relationship.¹

A second problem James considered was concerned with the perceptual and conceptual worlds. At the end of the last chapter we saw that he held that the function of the cognitive faculty is to remodel the world presented to it by the senses. This function was, primarily, the task of transforming the perceptual world into the conceptual, under the guidance of the volitional faculty, in order to give man a plan of action in the world. James attributed to conception both a meaning and a content. The meaning, having to do with the fringe of the object, went beyond the content. Here was the problem: How could a conception terminate in an effect

that was greater than its cause?²

James, also, sought a means of reconciling the contradictory characteristics he analyzed in the concept and in the stream from which it arose. These contradictory elements were discreteness and continuity, unchangeableness and changeableness, the self-sufficiency of sensation and the inadequacy of conception.

James recognized these problems as belonging to metaphysics. Psychology had taken him as far as it could. He considered it to be "particularly fragile, and into which the waters of metaphysical criticism leaks at every joint, a psychology all of whose elementary assumptions and data must be reconsidered in wider connections and translated into other terms."³ After writing the Principles he felt free to take up the provisional philosophical doctrine he had held in reserve for many years.

James stated the nature and purpose that he thought a philosophy should have in an address, "The Sentiment of Rationality," given in 1879. Man's rational nature, he contended, seeks rest and peace in an harmonious unity of the diverse elements of the world. The philosophic need, therefore, is to bring the sensible diversity of the world into a unity, while, at the same time, preserving the clearness of the diverse elements considered separately. This will be accomplished when man reaches a unity in diversity.

²Ibid., 465.
³Ibid., 467.
when the parts fit together into an intrinsic schematic whole.

"The entire process of philosophic simplification of the chaos consists of two acts, Identification and Association. Both are principles of union and theoretic rationality; but the rationality between things associated is outward and custom-bred. Only when things are identified do we pass inwardly and necessarily from one to the other."  

James proposed two steps toward unifying the chaos. The first step is to classify the items of the chaos. This is done by concentration of a conception on a particular attribute of a thing. When a certain attribute is picked out in this way, "we literally and strictly identify it in that respect with the other concretes of the class having that attribute for its essence."  

The second step in the unification of the chaos is the association of class attributes among themselves. This is achieved when the connection between certain class-concepts and certain determined consequences is established. The connections between things only becomes established, however, "when, by successive substitutions of essences for things, and higher for lower essences, we succeed in reaching a point of view from which we can view the

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5Ibid., 102.

6Ibid., 105.
things as one."7

Thus, from this statement of the purpose of philosophy, James thought it evident that "our idea of the universe cannot assume an inwardly rational shape until each separate phenomenon is conceived as fundamentally identical with every other."8 This was his way of stating his search for an intrinsic unifying element in things. He did not want an external framework, nor even a logical one if it were not intrinsic to things themselves.

Among the elements to be brought into unity were those of the perceptual and conceptual worlds. Before we will be able, however, to show how James claimed to unify these almost contradictory worlds, we must discuss, at some length, the unifying principle that he derived for all things, according to his philosophical ideas.

For eight years after the Principles had been published James worked over his tentative philosophical system. James called his general attitude in philosophy that of radical empiricism, and the basic, unifying element to be found in all things he called "pure experience." In 1898, while becoming more convinced that his philosophy of pure experience might be the solution he was seeking, James wrote that "the whole use of the 'change of base' to pure experience is to see whether one may thereby solve certain problems which are stickers on the usual dualistic categories, e.g.: . . .

7 Ibid., 108.
8 Ibid., 109.
The perceptual and conceptual worlds... Could the facts that enter into these problems be smoothly formulated without paradox or contradiction on the basis of the pure experience or pure-phenomenon hypothesis, then the latter would certainly score a great triumph.\(^9\)

While James was formulating his philosophy, he rejected many of the assumptions he had made in writing his *Principles*. Among the questioned assumptions was that of the primacy he had attributed to consciousness. At the end of his *Psychology*, he wrote that "it seems as if consciousness as an inner activity were rather a postulate than a sensibly given fact."\(^{10}\) In 1904, therefore, in an article entitled "Does Consciousness Exist?" James made a formal statement of his new position that there is only "one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff 'pure experience,' then knowing can easily be explained."\(^{11}\)

In this study of the broad outlines of James’s philosophy of pure experience, the three divisions established by Ralph Barton Perry will be followed. The first stage of James’s development,


\(^{10}\)James, *Psychology*, p. 247.

according to Perry, is the psychological stage. This phase consists in the enrichment of the conception of experience in order that it may be competent to embrace the structures and activities of knowledge. The second phase is to bring within experience the distinction between mind and body. This demands that experience be "neutralized," freed from exclusive association with consciousness so that it may embrace the physical world as well. The third and last step in James's development is to identify this new conception of experience with the metaphysical reality. Each of these three phases will be discussed in turn in order that the salient features of James's philosophy may be seen.

James's initial formulation of his philosophy consisted in the enrichment of experience. This enrichment took place in his analysis of consciousness which was discussed in the previous chapter. However, there are three philosophically significant ideas that should be stressed.

The first of these ideas is that of the transitive states of consciousness. Despite the obscurity of these states, James declared that they were actually present to the sensitive and practiced eye of an introspectionist. Their importance is that "they qualify their termini—both the has-just-been and the soon-about-to-be." The philosophical importance of these states is that

13 Ibid., 82.
they give "verifiable meaning to concepts which had hitherto been abstract and verbal."\textsuperscript{14}

Perry considers James's insistence on the validity of the transitive states an example of James's efforts "to carry all the terms of discourse back to the original data of sense."\textsuperscript{15} James, in this effort, thought the term "feeling" would best express what he desired, if it was freed from its association with affective or emotional states. This feeling would be, James thought, "the apprehension of the \textit{in-itselfness} of some root character, discriminable from all others, requiring a name of its own, and evoking the comment, 'I see what it is,' from minds possessed of the appropriate sensibilities and directed to the right context."\textsuperscript{16}

James's second important idea in this psychological stage of the development of his philosophy is that he gave empirical meaning to the relation of subject and object. Philosophers of James's time thought that there was no common ground of which both subject and object partook. James reduced the subject to verifiable terms by considering personal identity as "the experience that 'makes a man be himself to himself.'"\textsuperscript{17} With the subject put back into experience along with the object, the relationship between them no

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 83.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 86.
longer had to be assumed or postulated. It could be found in a common experience. James felt that if abstracted elements, such as subject, were restored to their original experience, he would find these elements embedded in a matrix of original relationships. Then there would be no need of postulating some artificial framework to explain these relationships.\(^\text{18}\)

The third important feature of James's psychological stage is his reduction of idea and object to the common terms of experience. When the idea is of the perceptual world, it becomes confluent with experience. In ideas of the conceptual world James distinguished two objectivities, one internal and one external. "The internal object is the experience of reference itself. . . . This objectivity occurs in the now-present experience."\(^\text{19}\) Besides this present meaningfulness of the concept, which consists in tendencies of the fringe, there is also an external element, the "meant." This "meant" is the future experience toward which the present concept is pointing and which will give validity to the present concept when it is actually experienced. Perry says that these "ulterior objective meaning which remain transcendent, become a set of experiences differing not in any radical sense, but only in their accidental inaccessibility. As distant, hypothetical, or possible experiences, they are of the same nature, and lie in the

\(^{18}\text{Ibid.}, 89.\)

\(^{19}\text{Ibid.}, 90.\)
same field, as the present experience." Thus, through a refined analysis, James has reduced ideas to the very same field of experience as objects occupy.

James claimed that the three ideas just discussed were only supplementations of the data accessible through introspection. With the careful introspection James used he enriched the content of consciousness. The three ideas just discussed were also the important ones, philosophically, in that enrichment, and they mark the psychological stage of his development.

The second phase of James's development of his philosophy of experience Perry calls the "phenomenalistic phase." This phase is primarily "an analysis, a reduction of the bodily and mental worlds to the same original components." To achieve this reduction, James had to neutralize experience, to free it from its association with consciousness. The discussion of this second phase will consist of four points: (1) pure experience as a method, (2) a refinement of the notion of consciousness, (3) the neutralization of experience, (4) Perry's analysis of this phase.

Even after James reduced subject and idea to the field of experience, as was discussed above, he still assumed an ulterior physical reality which consciousness did not include. In his effort to reconstruct the basic structures of this reality and con-

\[\text{\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 91.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 97.}\]
sciousness so that they could be founded in a more basic unifying reality, James assumed pure experience as a method. "The principle of pure experience," he writes, "is also a methodical postulate. . . . Everything real must be experienceable somewhere, and every kind of thing experienced must somewhere be real."22 In the preface to his collection of essays under the title of *The Meaning of Truth*, James restates this principle and elaborates on it. He speaks here of radical empiricism which is the general theory that professes pure experience to be the basic reality. James then goes on to say that

radical empiricism consists first of a postulate, next a statement of fact, and finally a generalized conclusion.

The postulate is that the only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience. . . .

The statement of fact is that the relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct particular experience, neither more so nor less so, than the things themselves.

The generalized conclusion is that therefore the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience.23

After James adopted pure experience as a methodical postulate, he subjected consciousness itself to this empirical criterion.

Finding that "the difference between mind and body itself is an experienced difference, then it is clear that experience must be

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22James, *Radical Empiricism*, p. 160.

assigned a more extended meaning than consciousness." 24 Therefore, James adopted the word "pure experience," so that it would not be confused with the experience of consciousness. Up to this time he had used the word consciousness and experience interchangeably. Now experience was "a more inclusive manifold within which consciousness itself . . . was distinguished and explained." 25

This new meaning and limitation of consciousness enabled James to give explicit empirical interpretation to the duality between the knowing mind and the external world. In the knower-known relationship, the object has a cognitive objectivity within consciousness. It has also a metaphysical objectivity, independent of its part in the knowledge relationship, "in the sense of belonging to another order than that mentality into which, through being known, it is introduced." 26 Thus in knowledge the mind somehow reaches beyond itself to another order.

Once James has, therefore, made experience more inclusive than consciousness, he can account for this new objectivity "by conceiving that the physical order and the mental order overlap in common phenomena or pure experience." 27

Perry's analysis of this second phase of James's philosophy

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24 Perry, In the Spirit of William James, p. 93.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 95.
27 Ibid.
is that it is tentative and not clearly formulated. He claims that the main principle, however, "is clear, namely, that both subjectivity in the mental sense and objectivity in the physical sense are particular modes of experience in the "pure" or "phenomenal" sense." In this phase pure experience has not been raised to the ultimate reality, it is a mere potentiality or a class name for the ultimate reality. It must first be filled out and elaborated before it can become the common element of all things. Perry concludes that James, in this second phase, "introduced pure experience as the aboriginal form of being, embracing consciousness, together with non-conscious or non-mental forms of being, such as bodies." 

With experience so neutralized, at the end of this phenomenalistic stage of his philosophical development, that it is the aboriginal form of all things, James is ready to proceed to his third and final phase, the metaphysical. In this phase, James raises pure experience to the ultimate metaphysical reality. The discussion of this third phase will consist of three steps: (1) the identification of pure experience with the ultimate reality, (2) the five characteristics of pure experience in this phase, (3) Perry's analysis of James's metaphysics of experience.

In the first and second phases of his philosophical develop-

\[28\] Ibid., 97.

\[29\] Ibid., 100.
ment, James widened the notion of experience by reducing various realities to empirically verifiable terms. James had made it possible that mind and body, and all their modes of existence, were experienceable realities. To find the deeper features of these realities, he turned to his analysis of perceptual experience. "The deeper features of reality," he writes, "are found only in perceptual experience."30

When James analyzed perceptual experience, it was not the obvious features he looked for but the hidden meanings. Perry gives an example of this analysis of James's thoughts on life. James writes that "there is something in life, as one feels its presence, that seems to defy all the possible resources of phraseology... The living moments--some living moments, at any rate--have somewhat of absolute [something of the absolute] that needs no lateral support. Their meaning seems to well up from out of their very centre, in a way impossible verbally to describe."31 Perry considers these moments as the moments of integration when experience becomes a self-sustaining reality.32

James himself writes of his reality as coming in moments or

30William James, Some Problems of Philosophy (New York, 1940), p. 97.

31Original paragraph which James wrote for the opening of the Gifford Lectures subsequently published under the title, The Varieties of Religious Experience, quoted by Perry, The Thought and Character of William James (Boston, 1935), II, 328. The phrase in brackets would seem to be the author's meaning.

32Perry, In the Spirit of William James, p. 103.
parts. He says that "though one part of our experience may lean upon another part to make it what it is in any one of several aspects in which it may be considered, experience as a whole is self-containing and leans on nothing." Thus, James identified pure experience with the ultimate metaphysical reality.

Once he has shown how James identified pure experience with basic reality, Perry begins to enumerate the characteristics which the deeper features of pure experience will have.

Being identified with experience, this reality will have all the qualities of sensation—immediacy, diversity, vividness, and vitality.

The gradual unfolding of the world through thought is a second characteristic of this pure experience. Since thought is a selection dictated by some personal interest, it is evident that there is something greater than the selection. "To select is to select from, which implies not only a residuum excluded from the selection, but a togetherness of the included and excluded in the original plenum." Since the plenum must be so constituted that the selection is possible, it must be a field of eligibility, and therefore, a world suitable to the exercise of freedom.

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33James, Radical Empiricism, p. 193. For a complete view of this identification, cf. Some Problems of Philosophy, Chs. X, XI and Pluralistic Universe, Chs. VI, VII.
34Perry, In the Spirit of William James, p. 103.
35Ibid., 104.
36Ibid.
The third characteristic of experience is the effort to re-
constitute the undivided field of choice. By being aware of the
interests that prompted the selection from the plenum in the sec-
ond stage, the metaphysician can reconstruct this original plenum.
Each act of selection is an enrichment of the concrete immediacy
of experience, but after analysis the mind is able to apprehend
a greater volume of the original experience. "The aim of meta-
physics is to profit by selective attention so that the differenti-
tated features may be embodied in a more adequate and inclusive
synthesis."37

A fourth characteristic, closely related to the third, is the
originality of reality. From an analysis of selection we become
aware of the original plenum. Thus analyzed, James's world is
"a selection in the making, amidst a superabundance of the unse-
lected."38 This world of James excludes nothing and includes every-
thing experienceable. Perry writes that "his universe is a uni-
verse by virtue of its omitting nothing, by virtue of its indeter-
minate immensity and complexity, its unanalyzed ingredients, its
unplumbed depths, its passage beyond every horizon, and not by
virtue of any architecture, or structural delimitation, whether
logical, aesthetic, or moral."39

37Ibid., 105-106.
38Ibid., 108.
39Ibid., 107.
Continuity is the fifth and final characteristic of James's world of pure experience. James saw the problem of continuity as a phase of the problem of the one and the many. In some way the unity of continuity had to be reconciled with the plurality of discreteness. In other words, how can the discrete moments of experience be reconciled with the general flow of the stream of experience? James proposed to solve this problem "by the notion of a manifold of overlapping particulars. In its temporal application this means that every moment is both retrospective and prospective as well as present." Each moment, therefore, contains, in some way, the elements of every other moment in the stream of experience. Each moment of this experience contains both what it has inherited from the past and what it needs to push onward toward the future.

The problem of the perceptual and conceptual worlds is a particular application of this problem of continuity, since the perceptual world is continuous and the conceptual is discrete. Perry says that a theory of knowledge can distinguish between the concept as an instrument and the reality to which it applies. "Metaphysics, on the other hand, must bring them into the same world. The comparative unreality of concepts must somehow be reconciled with the fact that there are concepts." James's problem was that of giving validity to conception after he said that percep-

40Ibid., 109.
41Ibid., 110.
tual knowledge reveals experience. He increased the difficulty of his problem by admitting that concepts have a certain objectivity of their own.

James's solution to this problem is a suggestion rather than an elaborated explanation, says Perry. "The essence of it lies in regarding concepts as abstractions, cuts, excerpts, taken from the plenum of reality by an interested act of selection. They present reality in some partial aspect suitable to action . . . or serve as a substitute for the fuller experience when it is unattainable." When attentive selection focuses on a partial aspect of a reality, there is a concept. It is only separated in the sense that it is distinguished from its context, but its context is none the less there. It is not separated in an ontological sense. Thus, concepts are real for they are part of the stream of experience, but they are unreal when taken by themselves as partial views of reality.

James reaffirmed the validity of conception, also, in admitting fixed meanings. When a part of experience is selected from the stream, it is divested of its changeable characteristics and it is seen as fixed and eternal. The true reality of this part of experience, however, is found only in the continuity of the stream.

42 Ibid., 110-111.
43 Ibid., 111.
44 Ibid., 112.
Perry summarizes James's philosophy when he writes that "in its finite and synthetic concreteness, it escapes the paradoxes which beset abstract infinity. Its overlapping and interpenetration of parts illuminate the mystery of identity and difference. Thus, the world of appearance not only loses those characters of inadequacy which have incited rationalistic metaphysics to its dialectical quest, but proves itself to be a potent solvent of ancient problems."\(^{45}\)

The main lines of James's philosophical development, through the three phases outlined by Perry, have been the subject of our discussion thus far in this chapter. Now, it is necessary to turn to another development, akin to that of philosophy, which had importance in James's notion of concept. This is his development of pragmatism. We will attempt to show the importance and relation of pragmatism to radical empiricism by examining the roots of these two developments. Then, there will be a brief statement of James's theory of meaning and of truth.

James's pragmatism and radical empiricism developed together both in his mature thought and in his writings.\(^{46}\) The relationship between these two streams of development were important for James considered that "the establishment of the pragmatist theory

\(^{45}\)Perry, Thought and Character, I, 461.

\(^{46}\)A study of the Annotated Bibliography of the Writings of William James by Perry, shows that the main body of James's philosophical writing took place in 1904-1906, whereas his pragmatism was elaborated on from 1907-1908.
of truth is a step of first-rate importance in making radical empiricism prevail."\(^47\) Through the application of pragmatism to the problems of the conceptual world James hoped to reduce conception to the world of experience by explaining the meaning and truth of concepts in experiential terms. Perry suggests two connections between James's philosophy and his pragmatism:

First, the former is an application of the latter: the pragmatic method and standard of truth are repeatedly applied to the proof of pluralism and the disproof of monism. Second, the latter is applied to the former: that is, the pragmatic account of knowledge affords a special case of the pluralistic metaphysics. . . . Pragmatism does not merely provide a method which can be employed in metaphysics--it provides a metaphysics of truth which is consistent with that general metaphysics which James advocates, through bringing the entire process of cognition within the field of possible experience.\(^48\)

A brief glance at the origins of pragmatism will find traces of it in James's earliest writings. James himself traced his earliest formulations of pragmatism to an address given in 1885, "On the Function of Cognition."\(^49\) He formally declared his pragmatism in an address given in 1898, "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results." Perry traces James's pragmatism to articles written in the 1870's where James stressed the teleological aspect of knowledge. In an article entitled, "The Development of James's

\(^{47}\)James, Meaning of Truth, p. xii.

\(^{48}\)Perry, Thought and Character, II, 585.

\(^{49}\)Cf. Meaning of Truth, pp. 41-42. Here James lists the ideas explicit in his address which were later developed in his Pragmatism.
Pragmatism Prior to 1879," Maurice Baum claimed that if his evidence and conclusions are sound, "James was a pragmatist before he wrote his Psychology, and he had attained prior to 1879 a conception of pragmatism both as a method and as a theory of truth which was complete in all essential respects." Baum proves his thesis by citing passages in James's earlier writings which are similar, almost verbatim at times, to the main characteristics of James's later pragmatism.

Pragmatism adds two important contributions to James's metaphysics of experience: the criterion of meaning, and the theory of truth. Each of these will be discussed briefly in turn.

James states that "the pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable. . . . [Its duty is] to interpret each notion by tracing its practical consequences." We saw before that a concept's meaning was involved with the fringe of the concept--the tendency toward future action and practical consequences. In order that the meaning of the concept be judged correct, it is necessary to find out whether the practical consequences intended are the actual conse-


51 Cf. Baum's article referred to above for a complete working out of his comparison of James's earlier writing to those of his later pragmatism, pp. 43-51.

quences worked out. This is done when the concept is put to work in the stream of experience. As a canon of meaning, therefore, the pragmatic method is necessary, because only in the stream of experience, which is the ultimate reality, is there true meaningfulness. Concepts, being cuts or excerpts from the stream, need this criterion to pass judgment on their meaning.

The pragmatic criterion of meaning was used only to penetrate the meaningfulness of concepts. James proposed his theory of truth as a criterion of their truthfulness.

For a pragmatist, "true ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify." Concepts, standing alone, selected from the stream are neither true nor false. In order to judge the truth of a concept, one must test the intended truth in its results in the stream of experience. That is why James writes that "truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process, the process namely of verifying itself, its verification. Its validity is the process of its validation." It is clear, therefore, that pragmatism, as Perry suggests, offers radical empiricism a metaphysics of truth and meaning.

In this chapter we have seen the development of James's philosophical thought beginning with the problems he saw in psychology

53 James, Meaning of Truth, pp. v-vi.
54 Ibid., p. vi.
and progressing to his adoption of pure experience as the basic reality. The specific problem of the concept was only one of many that initiated James's philosophical quest. However, we have seen hints of his solution to this specific problem of concept when James discussed the continuity of the stream and pragmatism. It has been necessary to give a rather full treatment to this entire philosophical development since many of the ideas considered enter into James's complete resolution of the problem of the concept which will now be considered in the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV

THE PROBLEM OF CONCEPT RESOLVED BY PURE EXPERIENCE

Once James had committed himself to pure experience as the ultimate metaphysical reality, he determined to work out a complete system. His death in 1910 prevented him from finishing his proposed synthesis. His nephew, Henry James, Jr., however, edited the manuscripts James had prepared. These are presented under the title Some Problems of Philosophy.

In Some Problems of Philosophy, James returned to the problem of the perceptual and conceptual worlds. He felt he now had a firm metaphysical basis on which he could resolve the apparent differences of these two worlds. With confidence he rejected the traditional intellectualist doctrine of concepts. The he proceeded to fill out and enrich the notion of concept he had presented in the Principles.

The discussion of the concept in this chapter will deal with (1) James's rejection of traditional doctrines on the concept, (2) his development of the origin, character, and function of the concept, (3) the conclusions James draws from his new analysis of the concept.

James claimed that Plato was the originator of the intellec-
tualist doctrine, when he "first thought of concepts as forming an entirely separate world and treated this as the only object fit for the study of immortal minds."¹ This Platonic influence carried on throughout philosophy with the tendency to treat conception as more essential in knowledge than perception. These philosophers, under the guidance of Plato, considered the senses as organs of illusion and sensation as obscure and confused. "This," claims James, "is the traditional intellectualist creed."²

James thought he found the source of this intellectualism in the uncritical habit of defining. "Whenever we conceive a thing we define it; and if we still don't understand, we define our definition."³ This habit of definition led the intellectualist philosophers farther and farther from the immediate stream of experience from which the concept was originally taken. When the habit of defining has carried these philosophers far afield, they blame, not the concepts, but the perceptual flux. They even go so far as to deny the perceptual part of experience, and construct an artificial structure by which they can explain thought and knowledge. Because of this artificial structure, James rejected the doctrines of Kant, Bradley, Green, and Royce.⁴

¹William James, Some Problems of Philosophy, ed. Henry James, Jr. (New York, 1940), p. 76.
²Ibid.
³Ibid., 83.
⁴Ibid., 84-85.
Apart from James's rejection of traditional doctrines because of their artificial structures, he had positive reasons for rejecting this emphasis on concepts which he thought to be excessive. In presenting these positive reasons he brought up the precise points of conflict between the perceptual and conceptual worlds.

The main difference between percepts and concepts is that "percepts are continuous and concepts are discrete. Not discrete in their being, for conception as an act is part of the flux of feeling, but discrete from each other in their several meanings."\(^5\) In conception, a part of experience is isolated and distinguished from the other parts of experience. If that same part is looked at perceptually, it has no meaning and is "found to telescope and compenstrate and diffuse into its neighbors."\(^6\) When James says that concepts are not discrete in their being, he is pointing to his solution of the problem of concepts. As an act, conception is part of experience. Since the act of conceiving constitutes the being of the concept, rather than its meaning, it is just as much a part of the stream of experience as the percept is.

Because of the discreteness of their meaning, concepts are "forever inadequate to the fulness of the reality to be known."\(^7\) Reality consists of existential particulars as well as of essences,

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\(^6\)Ibid., 49-50.

\(^7\)Ibid., 78.
and universals. This total reality is known only in the perceptual flux. In order to prove the priority of sensation, or perception, James proposed to prove that concepts were inadequate and that they falsified the total reality. These two points will be discussed before James's positive characteristics of conception are considered.

Conception is a secondary process which presupposes perception. "To understand a concept you must know what it means. It means always some this, or some abstract portion of a this, with which we first made acquaintance in the perceptual world." Before any conception is possible, there must be perception. James says that "all conceptual content is borrowed." Even if one considers conceptions arising from previous conceptions, the original concepts were directly from perceptual experience. Thus, being secondary formations, concepts are inadequate to express the fullness of reality.

Since concepts are inadequate, the aspect they give of reality is distorted. They leave out part of the perceptual flux by their very nature. This has led philosophers, erroneously, to reject the perceptual flux as unreal. James attributes two reasons for the inadequacy of conception.

8Ibid., 79.
9Ibid.
10Ibid., 80-81.
When concepts are substituted for percepts, their relations are substituted also. "But since the relations of concepts are of static comparison only, it is impossible to substitute them for the dynamic relations with which the perceptual flux is filled." Even though the concept might designate a part of the flux that was active, the concept remains of an intrinsically stationary nature which does not change even though its terms symbolize changing originals.

The second reason for the inadequacy of conception is that "the conceptual scheme, consisting as it does of discontinuous terms, can only cover the perceptual flux in spots and incompletely." Concepts are the substantive parts of the flux and they fail to represent the transitive features which are so important. James liked to compare the conceptual system to a map. Concepts are the cities marked on the map, but they are worthless without the connecting roads and highways which represent the perceptual flow of experience.

In James's mind concepts and percepts are "so interlaced, and our life rests on them so interchangeably and undiscriminatingly, that it is often difficult to impart quickly to beginners a clear notion of the difference meant." He found them so entwined that

11Ibid., 81.
12Ibid.
13Ibid., 47.
it was difficult to speak of one without bringing in the other. It is necessary, therefore, in our discussion to proceed cautiously in order to get the proper notion of concept. To achieve our purpose, we will divide this second part of our discussion, the development of the concept, into a treatment of the origin, content and function, value, and purpose of the concept. Finally, we will present James's final statement on the concept.

In the act of conceiving, the mind, through attention, selects certain objects from the perceptual flux of experience. Then the mind names and identifies these objects. It says "what each part of the sensible continuum is, and all these abstracted whats are concepts." 14

When James discusses the content and the function of the concept, he uses the concept of man as an example. He says this concept, and all concepts, "is three things: 1, the word itself; 2, a vague picture of the human form which has its own value in the way of beauty or not; and 3, an instrument for symbolizing certain objects from which we may expect human treatment when occasion arrives." 15 The vague form is the nucleus or topic of the concept. This is the part isolated from the flux and named. This is what the concept is about. No matter how valuable this part may be, "the more important part of its significance may

14Ibid., 50.
15Ibid., 58.
naturally be held to be the consequences to which it leads. These may lie either in the way of making us think, or in the way of making us act. Whoever has a clear idea of these knows effectively what the concept practically signifies." Thus James insists that the functional value of the concept is more important than the content.

The functional aspect of concepts, which lead us to think or to act, receives its value from the fact that concepts can be substituted for percepts. In fact, most adults spend their time in this substitution process. "The intellectual life of man consists almost wholly in his substitution of a conceptual order for the perceptual order in which his experience originally comes." Through this substitution man is led to concepts of a higher order and to a fuller intellectual life.

Concepts are so frequent in adult life that they appear as trains—each one is discrete, but coupled with the next by a relationship found in the fringe of each. Just as the mind, through attention, singled out certain parts of the perceptual flow, so it singles out parts of the conceptual train. This is the origin of concepts of a higher order of abstractness.

Because of the power of man's mind to discern and single out

16 Ibid., 59.
17 Ibid., 51.
18 Ibid.
these higher concepts, there is no limit to what can be conceived. When new relations are found between these concepts, new worlds of knowledge arise. These new relations enable man to set up various schemes of fixed order, such as we have in mathematics or other a priori sciences. James would give validity to this process, insisting that "the terms are indeed man-made, but the order, being established solely by comparison, is fixed by the nature of the terms on the one hand and by our power of perceiving relations on the other."\(^{19}\)

James realized that this was the way man's mind dealt with the reality presented to it. Man's understanding of "any mass of perceptual fact consists in assimilating its concrete terms, one by one, to so many terms of the conceptual series, and then in assuming, that the relations intuitively found among the latter are what connect the former."\(^{20}\) This inductive-hypothesis method, whose value he had learned from his early scientific training, James attributed to conception. Through it there is a theoretic conquest over the order in which nature originally comes. It also brings "the revelation of a deeper level of reality in things. Being more constant, it is truer, less illusory than the perceptual order, and ought to command our attention more."\(^{21}\)

\(^{19}\)Ibid., 69.
\(^{20}\)Ibid., 70.
\(^{21}\)Ibid., 71.
Concepts have a second value besides that of knowledge of a higher order. They help man to revalue his life. James compares their relation to percepts with the relation of sight to touch. Through sight man is prepared for the things with which he must come into contact. Likewise, concepts prepare man for his future life in the perceptual flux of experience. This foreknowledge gives meaning to life, it arouses "new feelings of sublimity, power, and admiration, new interests and motivations."\(^{22}\)

So far in discussing the positive development of James's notion of concept, we have treated the origin, content and function, and the value of conception. Now we must discuss its purpose.

Despite the excellence of its substitutional value, the primary purpose of conception is to guide man in his life in the perceptual world of experience. The conceptual world opens up the future of the perceptual world and helps to give it meaning. Conception helps man to harness perceptual reality so that he can guide it in his own interests. "With concepts," James writes, "we go in quest of the absent, meet the remote, actively turn this way or that, bend our experience, and make it tell us whither it is bound. We change its order, run it backwards, bring far bits together and separate near bits, jump about over its surface instead of plowing through its continuity, string its items on as many ideal diagrams as our mind can frame. All these are ways of handling\(^{22}\)"

\(^{22}\)Ibid., 72.
the perceptual flux and meeting distant parts of it."\textsuperscript{23} Thus conception's primary function is to adapt man practically to the totality of the perceptual world in which he lives.

In the last analysis, man needs both percepts and concepts for the completeness of his life. They must work together. They "interpenetrate and melt together, impregnate and fertilize each other. Neither, taken along, knows reality in its completeness. We need them both, as we need both our legs to walk with."\textsuperscript{24} James concludes by "allowing conceptual knowledge to be self-sufficing, while at the same time . . . maintaining that the full value of such knowledge is got only by combining it with perceptual reality again."\textsuperscript{25}

Now that James's rejection of the traditional doctrines on concept and the positive development of his own doctrine have been discussed, it is necessary to turn to the third and final part of his discussion of the concept. Once he felt that his position had been established, there were a number of conclusions which flowed from this. We will now discuss each of these conclusions as they appeared to James.

James felt that his satisfactory explanation of conception and his rejection of intellectualism confirmed his adoption of em-

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 52-53.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 58.
piricism. This is the first and primary corollary that James thought followed from his preceding analysis of the concept.

With empiricism confirmed, novelty in the universe becomes possible. "In human experience the parts are percepts, built out into wholes by our conceptual additions. The percepts are singu-

lars that change incessantly and never return exactly as they were before. This brings an element of concrete novelty into our ex-

perience."26 Here again James stresses the primacy of the percept-

tual world and sensation. He admits that concepts are useful, but they "can never fitly supersede perception."27

This does not mean, however, that concepts and their relations are not just as real, in their own way, as percepts are. This is James's third conclusion. He goes on to define what he means by real as "anything is real of which we find ourselves obliged to take account in any way."28 With such a definition, it is clear that concepts must be real. However, he warns that the reality which concepts enjoy is inferior to that of percepts, because it is so static and schematic and lacks many of the characteristics which perceptual reality enjoys.

A fourth conclusion is that the self-sameness of ideal objects is confirmed. A concept, by its very nature, always means the same

26 Ibid., 98.
27 Ibid., 100.
28 Ibid., 101.
thing. "On this self-sameness of conceptual objects the static and 'eternal' character of our systems of ideal truth is based; for a relation, once perceived to obtain, must obtain always, between terms that do not alter."\(^{29}\) He denies the nominalist position that a concept, used in different contexts as intrinsically the same, is only a name. He says that the concept "same" means "either (a) that no difference can be found between ... two objects when compared, or (b) that we can substitute the one for the other in certain operations without changing the result."\(^{30}\) James felt that many philosophers confused a concept of the "same" with the same physical quality. For example, these philosophers did not think the whiteness of the snow, taken as a physical property, could be the same as the whiteness of paper. James concludes that "our meanings can be the same as often as we intend to have them so, quite irrespective of whether what is meant by a physical possibility or not."\(^{31}\)

What James is trying to affirm in this notion of the self-sameness of ideal objects is "the platonic doctrine that concepts are singulars, that concept-stuff is inalterable, and that physical realities are constituted by the various concept-stuffs of which they 'partake.'" It is known as 'logical realism' in the

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\(^{29}\)Ibid., 102.

\(^{30}\)Ibid., 103.

\(^{31}\)Ibid., 105.
history of philosophy." James admitted that this may seem contradictory for an empiricist, but his purpose was "to combine logical realism with an otherwise empiricist mode of thought."33

James's final conclusion is that concepts and percepts are consubstantial; that is, "they are made of the same kind of stuff, and melt into each other when we handle them together."34 It is difficult, he contends, to tell how much of man's mental life is gotten from sense and how much from conception. Man constantly uses both, and they both interact on him. He claims that these "two mental functions thus play into each other's hands. Perception prompts our thought, and thought in turn enriches our 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."35

With these conclusions which James draws from his final explanation of concept, as enriched by pure experience, we finish our exposition of James's notion of concept as found in his psychological and philosophical writings. In the last chapter, a few conclusions must be drawn and a few observations made.

32 Ibid., 106.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 107.
CHAPTER V

SOME CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

Now that we have discussed James's notion of the concept as he presented and developed it in his psychology and philosophy, we might ask how James's notion of the concept compares with the traditional scholastic notion. It would seem that James was anti-scholastic in as much as he considered scholasticism as a form of the intellectualism which he had rejected. The discussion will begin with a preliminary comment on the teleological purpose of concept in James, then one major point of comparison will be discussed.

Throughout his development of the notion of concept, James insisted that it is a teleological instrument and that it is more important functionally than as a content. The main reason for this seems to be James's denial of the power of the mind to grasp reality in its completeness. "We have," he wrote, "no organ or faculty to appreciate the simply given order. The real world as it is given objectively at this moment is the sum total of all its beings and events now. . . . It is an order with which we have nothing to do but to get away from it as fast as possible." ¹

There seem to be two reasons for this denial. James's scientific background, with its evolutionary tendencies, made him see the world of knowledge evolving to a more and more perfect state. Whatever is known is just a portion of all there is to be known. Though knowledge may increase and become more perfect, there will always be more which the mind can never fully grasp.

James's personal experiences, also, prepared him for this denial. In his early life he could not assimilate, intellectually, the problems and trials he experienced. As a result of these, he developed the notion of the "will to believe." This was an admission that certain problems could not be solved intellectually, but had to be taken to the volitional level in order that man could assimilate them into his daily life satisfactorily.

Consequent on this denial of the power of the mind, James subordinated intellect to will. In order that man live harmoniously in this world and control it, as much as he could, James had to rely on a principle other than intellect. He gave primary importance, therefore, to the will. Thus knowledge and the concept became teleological instruments subordinated to the command of the personal interests of the will.

With primacy given to the teleological aspect of the concept, James mitigated the content of the concept. For him this was the least important part of the concept, and he never seemed to give a clear notion of just what the content of the concept should be. This vagueness leads us to a consideration of James's method in
developing the notion of the concept, and finally a comparison of his method with the scholastic method.

Through introspection and descriptive psychology James considered the concept as a reflex percept. The mind singles it out of the stream of thought and identifies it as being the same as a previous thought. Once singled out, the concept can be separated from the context with which it was received by the concentration of attention. Finally, with the expansion of concentration to the fringe tendencies, the concept can become universal or particular.

This, in general, would be the method of descriptive psychology. Once the concept is singled out, it could be considered a name for various members of a class; it could be considered as a quality which is found in various individuals; or it could be considered as the basic concept-stuff which other beings participate.

From his use of this method, James did arrive at some philosophical notion of the concept. It was a piece, a part along with all else, of pure experience. Though it falsified reality to a degree, it was a necessary instrument in shaping the rich variety of reality in pure experience. Finally, it was inseparably connected with the percept and the perceptual flux.

Jean Wahl concludes from this that "James is a nominalist, a conceptualist, and a realist in turn. He is a nominalist in the sense that the 'particular concrete' alone possesses profound truth and real worth for him. He is a conceptualist in the sense that,
in his mind, there exists around our particular ideas a fringe of general meaning, and, on the other hand, that there is a certain element of generality in things."\(^2\) In James's affirmation that "concept-stuff is inalterable, and that physical realities are constituted by the various concept-stuffs of which they partake,"\(^3\) Wahl sees him as a realist.

The scholastic notion of the concept, on the other hand, is developed philosophically and with a philosophical method. It is firmly rooted in a basic metaphysics and theory of knowledge that are based on first principles of being and knowledge. That the mind can know and attain truth and thereby gain a certain mastery over the world of being is one of its primary and undeniable principles. James tried to use an inverse process and attempted to build a metaphysics and theory of knowledge from the problems he recognized in descriptive psychology; but he could not cross the bridge between scientific and philosophical psychology successfully, though he realized there was a bridge to be crossed.

In conclusion, James held tenaciously to the traditional notions and validity of conceptual knowledge. He enriched and defended the notion of concept against the scientific and philosophical misconceptions about it in his day. In fact, it would seem that James would have accepted the scholastic notion of the concept if


\(^3\)Ibid., 161.
he had known what it was in a more specific way, and if he had not rejected it as a part of other intellectualist theories.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mr. Paul Vincent Robb, S.J.
has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

October 27, 1958
Date

Signature of Adviser