The Psychological and Metaphysical Development of the Stream of Thought in the Philosophy of William James

John Thomas Dulin
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses

Recommended Citation
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/983

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 1956 John Thomas Dulin
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT
OF THE STREAM OF THOUGHT IN THE
PHILOSOPHY OF WILLIAM JAMES

by

John Thomas Dulin, S. J.

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

February
1956
LIFE

John Thomas Dulin was born in Janesville, Wisconsin, January 12, 1927.

He was graduated from Loras Academy, Dubuque, Iowa, January, 1945. From January until June of that year he attended Loras College.

In June, 1945, he entered 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.

From 1949 to 1952 the author studied Philosophy at West Baden University, affiliated with Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois.

The author taught mathematics, English, and speech at St. Xavier High School, Cincinnati, Ohio, from 1952 to 1955, during which period he spent a summer taking graduate courses in Psychology at Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois.

At present the author is pursuing theological studies at West Baden University.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION TO WILLIAM JAMES</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background--Various fields of interest--Personal characteristics--Influences on thought--Outstanding contributions--Approach to psychology--Basic assumptions in psychology--Evaluation of his position.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE STREAM OF THOUGHT IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WILLIAM JAMES</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of thought process--Personal element in thought--Uniqueness of each thought--The stream of thought--Relations in the stream of thought--Objects of the stream of thought--Selectivity of the stream of thought--Meaning of &quot;self&quot;--Principle of individual existence--Pure principle of personal identity--Denial of substantial thinker--Passing thought as the only thinker.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE CONFLICT BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeds of monism in the psychology--Parallel between postulated thinker and postulated matter--Indications of pure experience--Elimination of the soul--Undermining of consciousness as an entity--Rejection of consciousness as an entity--Postulate of pure experience--Epistemological function of pure experience--Nature of pure experience--Difficulties in the concept of pure experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE PHILOSOPHY OF RADICAL EMPIRICISM</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinguishing mark of radical empiricism--Relation to pragmatism and humanism--Basic tenets of radical empiricism--Methodological postulate--Statement of fact--Generalized conclusion--Pure experience as a neutral monism--Difficulties in the new theory--Solution of difficulties--Influence of Bergson.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
James's incomplete work--Principal trends in his thought--Dominant interest--Application of theory of pure experience--Position of James in American thought--Critique of his final position.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO WILLIAM JAMES

The purpose of this thesis is an exposition of William James's theory of the "stream of thought" as it is developed in his Principles of Psychology, and its relationship to his later philosophy of Radical Empiricism. The scope of the thesis is confined to two of the three general fields into which the writings of James fall, namely, the nature of the mind, and the structure and criteria of knowledge. The third category, that of religious belief, has no direct bearing on the thesis topic and therefore will not be considered.

Since the works of such an extraordinary man as William James cannot be properly understood, or his difficulties and problems properly appreciated, without a brief study of his background, interests, and characteristics, we will first take up a study of James the man and his approach to psychology.

William James was born in the year 1842 of a wealthy New York family. He spent much of his boyhood, however, in Europe, and thus he acquired from the beginning a definitely cosmopolitan outlook. From his father, Henry James, Sr., William received a lasting interest in religion and religious questions.
The elder James, a man of leisure with a definitely independent mind in matters of religion, devoted much of his time to theological works.

The earliest perceptible influence on William James, however, was not religion but art. His interest in painting was shortlived and was superseded by an attraction to the field of science. James received his M.D. from Harvard in 1869, and began his teaching career there four years later as instructor in anatomy and physiology. This position, however, opened the door to still another, and in 1876 he organized the first psychological laboratory at Harvard. Fourteen years later, his outstanding work, Principles of Psychology, appeared. Its remarkable success established him as the leading psychologist of this country. Here again James's varying career took another turn. Even before the publication of the Principles, his interest in psychology began to wane, and he grew more and more attracted to philosophy. His last years were spent in attempting to develop a systematic philosophy, which he termed Radical Empiricism.

From this brief sketch we can see several characteristics of James, the most obvious of which are his restless nature and his widely diversified interests. Even a cursory reading of his works reveals that James was a deeply religious man, though this trait found expression more in his kindness to men than in his devotion to God. Not only his father's keen interest in matters religious, but also, and much more striking, his strong
independence of mind showed up in the son. William, a voracious reader, shows the influence of a great number of philosophers and psychologists, though he steadfastly refused to accept in toto the position of any one of them. As Perry says, "James benefited by the new movements in German, French, and English psychology without surrendering himself wholly to any of them." The early attraction of James to art shows still another facet of his nature. We perceive time after time when reading his works that James was basically an artist, a man with an imaginative flair, a man given to brilliant flashes of intuition rather than to the rigorous and orderly reasoning of a scientist or a philosopher. James found it impossible to tie himself down to lengthy laboratory experiments or to the working out of problems recurrent in his thought. He left the laboratory work to his assistants, and borrowed extensively from the thought of others whenever he was forced to solve a particular philosophic problem. His strength lay rather in his ability to popularize and synthesize, and it was he more than any other who made psychological and philosophic problems understandable by the non-academic world.

The literary atmosphere of the James home, combined with the abundant opportunities for meeting the writers and the thinkers of his day, stimulated William's mind to extensive

reading. That he was greatly influenced by the men whose works he had read is obvious from all of his writings, but especially from the Principles. 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, and Spencer, of the British group figure prominently in James's psychology. Their ideas were assimilated by James, and reappeared bearing the stamp of his own approach and characteristics. This approach consisted primarily, as Knox says, in "a strong sense of individual values," for "James's philosophy was a study of man, or of life." He did not regard biology, medicine, psychology, philosophy, or religion as so many independent, abstract disciplines, but as valuable sources of light and information on human nature. His "strong sense of individual values," comments Mr. Knox, "... must have found expression under any circumstances; but the advent of Darwinism gave to his mind the precise scientific cue that it required." The influ-

2 Gardner Murphy, Historical Introduction to Modern Psychology, New York, 1949, 192.

3 H. V. Knox, The Philosophy of William James, New York, 1914, 3.

4 Ralph Barton Perry, Present Philosophical Tendencies, New York, 1925, 350.

5 Ibid., 350.

6 Knox, 3.
ence of Darwin in James's psychology, according to the same writer, "... consists primarily in a special application to animal and human consciousness of the Darwinian conception of biological utility."

James was not, however, the first to apply the concept of evolution to the explanation of the human mind. Herbert Spencer had preceded him in this in his treatment of the life of the mind as a process of continuous adjustment to its external environment. But Spencer had defined adjustment as adaptation, thus assigning a passive role to the mind. To this James dissented vigorously. He too stressed Darwin's theory of accidental or spontaneous variation, but he denied that this variation was to be attributed to environment alone. His position, characteristically empirical, was that the facts of psychology could not be explained without restoring to the mind that spontaneous productivity which Spencer had ignored.

---

7 Ibid., 9. Mr. Knox has a brief but helpful comparison of Darwin and James: "The secret of Darwin's scientific success was his firm grasp of the principle that a genuine explanation of biological phenomena can only be given in biological terms; and that, more particularly, an explanation of organic evolution must be couched in terms of the interest of the organism. Now 'the pursuance of future ends, and the choice of means for their attainment, are the mark and criterion of the presence of mentality in a phenomenon.' By connecting this with the Darwinian standpoint, the sciences of biology and psychology can be rendered essentially continuous."

8 Lloyd Morris, William James, New York, 1950, 15.
Thus we see the influence of two men, the one a scientist and the other a philosopher, on James the psychologist. From the scientist he took his approach to psychology, adapting the theory and methods of biology with scarcely any change but that necessary for the application of the theory of evolution to the mind process. From the philosopher he took the idea of applying this theory of evolution to psychology, but changed the method of application to agree with his own position on the nature of the mind.

James was similarly influenced later in his career by other thinkers and writers. For example, the solution to his famous "spiritual crisis" was inspired by Renouvier's second Essais, as James tells us in his work The Will to Believe.\(^9\) And again in his last series of lectures, published under the title A Pluralistic Universe, he found the solution to a serious philosophic dilemma\(^10\) in the writings of Henri Bergson.\(^11\) In the same series of lectures we learn that James was led to consider, under the influence of Fechner, the plausibility of a "world soul," or, at least, of some higher form of consciousness.\(^12\)

\(^9\) Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Briefer Version, 121.

\(^10\) Either to give up the logic of identity, or to accept human experience as fundamentally irrational.


\(^12\) Ibid., 290.
We have thus seen James taking his cue from Darwin, following the path of Spencer (though disagreeing with him in many particulars), and finding the solution of several major problems in the writings of Renouvier, Bergson, and Fechner. These are but the outstanding examples of the influence of other men on his own thought and writings, and yet, in spite of the large place which must be given to these men, James developed a number of theories which were decidedly his own. Among these were his "stream of thought," his theory on the emotions, and his theory of "pure experience," which was so fundamental a point in his philosophy of Radical Empiricism. It is the opinion of his outstanding commentator, Ralph Barton Perry, that the "stream of thought" theory takes first place among his specifically psychological doctrines, and, with the possible exception of his theory of the dependence of knowledge on the will, the "stream of thought" actually stands as James's most important philosophic insight. 13

The purpose of this thesis is, as we have stated, a study of the relationship between the "stream of thought" and the basic tenets of James's later philosophy of Radical Empiricism. That such a relationship exists is indicated by the following analysis of Dr. Perry:

James's theory of knowledge was developed from this psy-
chological standpoint, and is throughout dominated by its two main characteristics: its emphasis on the categories of interest and practice; and its reduction of relations, substances, activities, and other alleged transcendent elements to the continuities of sense experience. The former motive in James's thought led to his voluntarism and pragmatism; the latter to his 'radical empiricism.'

In order better to understand the theory of "stream of thought," we will now consider briefly James's approach, methods, and use of terms in the Principles of Psychology.

James defines psychology at the beginning of his work as "a science of mental life, both of its phenomenon and its conditions." It may be noted here that this is not the etymological definition of the word. In the original Greek, the words \( \phi \nu \chi \alpha \lambda \omicron \gamma \omicron \varsigma \) mean "study of the soul." James, however, strongly objected to the "orthodox spiritualistic theory" of the soul, according to which the diverse mentalist modes are affiliated with a "simple entity, the personal Soul, of which they are taken to be so many facultative manifestations." Though James objects to

---

14 R. B. Perry, Philosophy of the Recent Past, New York, 1926, 186.


16 Ibid., I. Cf. I, 214 and 342-350 for discussion of the "soul theory," and its rejection. That James was familiar with the traditional scholastic explanation of the soul is evident from these pages. His source, however, seems to be Cartesian rather than scholastic for the explanation which he follows (and rejects) divides all being into res extensa, the physical, and res cogitans, the mental. In the latter, two elements are distinguished: an active thinker, or soul; and the substance of the soul's thoughts, or consciousness.
"psychology with a soul," he objects just as strongly to the associationist theory of Herbart, Hume, the Mills, and Bain, namely, "psychology without a soul." This group tried to explain mental phenomena by common elements in the diverse mental facts rather than by a common agent behind them. To James, neither position was satisfactory because neither explained such problems as why our memory clings more easily to the near than to the remote, or why our memory should lose its grasp of proper names sooner than abstract.\(^{17}\)

Since psychology is "a science of mental life," the next question to be determined is that of the presence of mental life. Concerning this question James says, "The pursuance of future ends and the choice of means for their attainment are . . . the mark and criterion of the presence of mentality in a phenomenon."\(^{18}\)

The science of psychology, like any other natural science, assumes certain data uncritically, namely, "that thoughts successively occur, and that they know objects in a world which the psychologist also knows."\(^{19}\) In other words, the psychologist assumes a "thorough-going dualism."\(^{20}\) He supposes

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 197.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 218.
two elements, a mind knowing and a thing known, and treats them as irreducible. At the time of writing the Principles, James was definitely committed to dualism, though Perry says, "This dualism was a provisional doctrine by which James the psychologist hoped to eliminate and postpone a question on which James the philosopher had not made up his mind."21 The "question" to which Perry refers was mentioned by James early in his writing when he distinguished between the assumptions of a man as a psychologist and "whatever monistic philosophy he may, as an individual who has the right also to be a metaphysician, have in reserve."22

Concerning the use of common terms in the Principles, James had no one word for all states of consciousness as such. Expressions like "mental state," "state of consciousness," and "subjective condition" he found too cumbersome. A word such as "feeling" was, he felt, too often taken as a synonym of "sensation," as opposed to thought, and the words "idea" and "thought" were commonly taken to exclude sensation. In this quandary, James could make no definite choice, though he preferred either "feeling" or "thought," and so he stated that he would often use

21 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Boston, 1935, II, 72. In another place Perry says, "In the Psychology he had allowed himself the conveniences of dualism, but the whole trend of his philosophical thought, both before and after the publication of the Psychology, had been against that provisional makeshift." Ibid., I, 273.

22 James, Principles, I, 220.
both of these words in a wider sense than usual to indicate any state of consciousness.23

With this brief introduction to William James, we can more fully understand his problems and better realize his unique position as pioneer in the field of American psychology. By way both of summary of this chapter and introduction to the next, we may cite the historian Joseph L. Blau:

James's psychology marked a radical shift in psychological perspective and furnished a basis for an equally radical change in philosophic emphasis. The shift was from a psychology which stressed the mechanical association of similar ideas to one in which mind was a dynamic and functional instrument of adaptation to the environment. James's psychology broke down the separation between mind and body by considering what had been traditionally called 'mind' as man's conscious, intellectual behavior, and what had traditionally been called 'body' as the biological context in which this behavior takes place. Thus his work provided a psychological basis for the overthrow of the dualism of mind and matter which had been the starting-point of most 'modern' philosophy.24

23 Ibid., 186.

CHAPTER II

THE STREAM OF THOUGHT IN THE PSYCHOLOGY
OF WILLIAM JAMES

Among James's specifically psychological doctrines, as we have said, the "stream of thought" may be considered his outstanding development.\(^1\) James begins his study of the mind from within with an analysis of the fact of thinking, for, he says, "The first fact for us ... as psychologists is that thinking of some sort goes on."\(^2\) He is using the word "thinking" here indiscriminately for every form of cognitive operation.

Proceeding empirically in his analysis, James notes five characteristics of the process of thinking: 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 it always appears to deal with objects indepen-

---

1 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Briefer Version, 195.

2 James, Principles of Psychology, I, 224.
dent of itself; and that it is interested in some parts of these objects to the exclusion of others. 3

Taking up his first point, James states, "It seems as if the elementary psychic fact were not thought or this thought or that thought, but my thought, every thought being owned." 4 No psychology, therefore, can question the existence of personal selves. 5 James denies that the notion of personality can mean anything essentially different from what is found in the stream of thought. Consequently he does not consider the abnormal cases of subconscious personality, such as those brought to the fore by hypnotism and automatic writing, to pertain to the present study. His reason is that in these abnormal cases, the tracts of thought indicate an organized "second-self" with memory, habits, and sense of identity.

What James means by his second characteristic of thought is that "no state once gone can recur and be identical with what it was before." 6 In other words, we never get the same sensation twice. We might think that we do, but upon closer inspection, "what is got twice is the same object." 7 The reason

3 Ibid., 225.
4 Ibid., 226.
5 Ibid., 226.
6 Ibid., 230.
7 Ibid., 231.
why we cannot get the same sensation twice is that "for an identical sensation to recur it would have to occur the second time in an unmodified brain. But this, strictly speaking, is a physiological impossibility." 8 Now if this is true in connection with sensations, a fortiori it is true in connection with thoughts.

Every thought we have of a given fact is, strictly speaking, unique, and bears only a resemblance of kind with our other thoughts of the same fact. When the identical fact recurs, we must think of it in a fresh manner, see it under a somewhat different angle, apprehend it in different relations from those in which it last appeared. 9

It is this theory, based on physiological data, that made it impossible for James to follow either Locke or Herbart, 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." 10 They held that "if the thing is composed of parts, then we must suppose that the thought of the thing is composed of the parts in thought . . . If the thing is simple, its thought is simple." 11

Meanwhile a necessary consequence of the belief in permanent self-identical psychic facts that absent themselves and recur periodically is the Brunian doctrine

8 Ibid., 232; cf. also 480.
9 Ibid., 233.
10 Ibid., 236.
11 Ibid., 237.
that our thought is composed of separate independent parts and is not a sensibly continuous stream. That this doctrine entirely misrepresents the natural appearances is what I next shall try to show.12

James begins his discussion of the third characteristic of thought by a quasi-definition of the word "continuous." It is "that which is without breach, crack, or division."13 The only two breaches that we can conceive to occur within a mind are either "interruptions, time-gaps during which the consciousness went out altogether to come into existence again at a later moment"; or "breaks in the quality, or content, of the thought, so abrupt that the segment that followed had no connection whatever with the one that went before."14 The most common time-gap is the fact of sleep, but there are others, such as those produced by anesthetics and drugs, in all of which there is definitely felt a continuity of self. That is why "a present thought, although not ignorant of the time-gap, can still regard itself as continuous with certain chosen parts of the past."15

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 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most natu-

12 Ibid., 237.
13 Ibid., 237.
14 Ibid., 239.
15 Ibid., 239.
rally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of sub-
jective life.16

The second type of break among the thoughts which have the same sense of belonging together is produced "by sudden contrasts in the quality of the successive segments of the stream of thought."17 In James's opinion, one who would maintain that these contrasts, however violent, break the continuity of the stream of thought are guilty either of "confusion" or of a "superficial introspective view."18 This observer would confuse the thoughts themselves, taken as subjective facts, and the things, taken as their objects.

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 a part of the consciousness as much as the joint is a part of the bamboo.19

James also places in the category of superficial those who fail to note that the previous object of our consciousness is taken together with the present object. Hence, for example, when a clap of thunder breaks the silence, the object of our consciousness is not the thunder alone, but "thunder-breaking-upon-

16 Ibid., 239.
17 Ibid., 239.
18 Ibid., 240.
19 Ibid., 240.
silence-and-contrasting-with-it."20 In support of this statement, he refers to his chapter on nervous activities, where he demonstrated that no state of the brain can be supposed instantly to die away.21 He admits, however, various rates of change in the stream of consciousness. These are shown by language itself "where every thought is expressed in a sentence, and every sentence closed by a period."22 He compares this phenomenon of change in consciousness to a bird's life, for "it seems to be made of an alternation of flights and perchings."23 Enlarging on this comparison, he gives the following explanation:

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 matters contemplated in the periods of comparative rest.

Let us call the resting-places the 'substantive parts,' and the places of flight the 'transitive parts,' of the stream of thought.24

James admits the great difficulty in analyzing these transitive parts; but he does not for that reason deny their existence, or reduce them to the more substantive parts, as many have done.

22 James, Principles, I, 244.
23 Ibid., 244.
24 Ibid., 243.
He says, "If there be such things as feelings at all, then so surely, and more surely, do feelings exist to which these relations are known."25 There are feelings of color, of cold, it is true, but there are also feelings of if, of next, of by. Why is it that language recognizes the former but refuses to recognize the latter? The former feelings are what James calls substantive, the latter, transitive. He claims that men persist in the error that where there is no name, no entity can exist. Consequently they have either denied the transitive states or have named them after the substantive perception to which they lead, thus bringing about greater and greater accentuation and isolation of the substantive parts.26

There are other modifications of consciousness existing and, upon careful analysis, even recognized, but these are generally treated in the same fashion as the transitive states. "The ordinary way is to assume that they are all emptinesses of consciousness, and so the same state. But the feeling of an absence is toto coelo other than the absence of a feeling."27

25 Ibid., 245.

26 James considers this denial of the transitive states and the consequent accentuation of the substantive states to be the fundamental error common to both the associationists and the "spiritualists." Likewise, he considers his insight into this matter of utmost importance in his own explanation of mental phenomena.

27 James, Principles, I, 252.
These tendencies are what James calls the "fringe" or "psychic overtones," and it is precisely these tendencies which constitute the difference between "acquaintance with" and "knowledge about" a thing. The former is knowledge without these psychic overtones, the latter, knowledge with such overtones.

The fourth characteristic of human thought is that it appears to deal with objects independent of itself. Our common-sense induces 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." In connection with knowledge by the mind of objects independent of itself, James takes up for discussion what he considers two erroneous opinions. The first is that 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. This opinion James

28 Ibid., 258.

29 Ibid., 259; cf. 221; also, William James, The Meaning of Truth, New York, 1932, 11; quoting John Grote, Exploratio Philosophica, London, 1865, 60: "We may speak in a double manner of the 'object' of knowledge. That is, we may either use language thus: we know a thing, a man; or we may use it thus: we know such and such things about the thing, the man. Language in general, following its true logical instinct, distinguished between these two applications of the notion of knowledge, the one being γνωστικό, noscere, kennen, connaitre; the other being εἰδεναι, scire, wissen, savoir."

30 James, Principles, I, 271.
denies when he says, "Thought may, but need not, in knowing, discriminate between its object and itself."31 Secondly, he objects to the misuse of the word "object" by those who take it to indicate only the "substantive kernal or nucleus of consciousness."32 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, at most, "the discovery of America." James maintains that it is not any one of these taken singly, but the whole sentence. "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 . . . may be."33 This brings up again the question of a complex object of thought and the associationist doctrine that whenever an object of thought contains many elements, the thought itself must be made up of just as many ideas, one idea for each element, and all fused together in appearance but separate in reality.34 James, again, denies this, saying that "however complex the object may be, the thought of it is one undivided state of consciousness."35

31 Ibid., 275.
32 Ibid., 275.
33 Ibid., 275.
34 Ibid., 277; cf. also II, 14.
35 James, Principles, I, 276.
The final characteristic of the stream of consciousness 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." Our senses are nothing more than organs of selection, picking out of what is an "undistinguishable, swarming continuum, devoid of distinction, . . . a world full of contrasts, of sharp accents, of abrupt changes, of picturesque light and shade." From among these sensations, the mind chooses again, selecting "certain of the sensations to represent the thing most truly, and considering the rest as its appearances, modified by the conditions of the moment." The perceptions of individual men differ as to precisely what each one perceives because of the differences in experience and in habits of attention, but in general the whole human race agrees in noticing, selecting, and naming certain definite portions of "the original world-stuff." The one outstanding case of complete diversity in selection is the splitting of the universe by each individual into two halves, namely, "me" and "not-me." Since only the former pertains to

36 Ibid., 284.
37 Ibid., 285.
38 Ibid., 285.
39 Ibid., 289.
40 Ibid., 289.
a "study of the mind from within." James proceeds to study the "me" by a systematic, empirical investigation of the meaning of "self."

"In its widest possible sense, a man's Self is the sum total of all that he can call his." Hence a man can be said to have a material self—his body and all his possessions; a social self—the recognition which he receives from his associates; a spiritual self—the psychic faculties taken concretely; and, finally, what James calls the "Pure Ego" or principle of personal unity. The scope of the word in the first two cases is obvious. The use of the word "self" according to the third and fourth meanings, which express more properly what we mean when we use the word, calls for careful investigation.

The "spiritual self" may be considered either abstractly, according to its division into faculties, or concretely, as either the entire stream of personal consciousness or the present "segment" or "section" of that stream. James proposes to consider this "self" abstractly first, in order to find out which portion of the stream may be taken as a nucleus of the subjective life as a whole. He will take up later a discussion of the "self" in its concrete aspect, when he discusses the nature of

41 Ibid., 224.
42 Ibid., 291.
the principle of unity in our consciousness.

In considering the "spiritual self" abstractly, most men would describe it in the same way—up to a point. "They would call it the active element in all consciousness; saying that . . . there is a spiritual something in him which seems to go out to meet these qualities and contents, whilst they seem to come in to be received by it."43 However, once they descended from this general description to particular characteristics, their opinions would begin to differ.

Some would say that it is a simple active substance, the soul, of which they are thus conscious; others, that there is nothing but a fiction, the imaginary being denoted by the pronoun I; and between these extremes of opinion, all sorts of intermediaries would be found.44 James maintains that this central part of the "self" is felt, that "it is something with which we also have direct sensible acquaintance,"45 but since his knowledge of this "self" is arrived at by his personal introspection and may therefore be, in part at least, inapplicable to other individuals, he proposes only his feeling in this matter. He is most distinctly aware of "the collection of these peculiar motions in the head or between the head and the throat."46 He does not claim that this is all

43 Ibid., 297.
44 Ibid., 298.
45 Ibid., 300.
46 Ibid., 301.
that the "self" consists of, but if the other portions which are as yet hidden are similar to this of which he is aware, then "it would follow that our entire feeling of spiritual activity, or what commonly passes by that name, is really a feeling of bodily activities whose exact nature is by most men overlooked."47

Since this is as far as he can go in an analysis of the "spiritual self" in its abstract aspect, he turns now to a study of the emotions of the "self."

There exists, says James, "an hierarchical scale, with the bodily Self at the bottom, the spiritual self at top, and the extracorporeal material selves and the various social selves between."48 Further analysis of these "selves" in a man shows that "each of us is animated by a direct feeling of regard for his own pure principle of individual existence, whatever that may be, taken merely as such."49 The question immediately arises: what is this "principle of individual existence"? It cannot be the inner nucleus of one's spiritual self, that collection of obscurely felt "adjustments"; nor can it be the concrete stream of one's thought; nor can it be the indivisible Soul-substance; nor can it be the mere pronoun I; for none of these arouse feeling

47 Ibid., 301.
48 Ibid., 313.
49 Ibid., 318.
and connote emotional worth. What is it then? James concludes that "its own body, . . . first of all, its friends next, and finally its spiritual dispositions, must be the supremely interesting objects for each human mind."50 And again, "My own body and what ministers to its needs are thus the primitive object, instinctively determined, of my egoistic interests."51

After this lengthy investigation of the phenomenal self, and the nature of self-regard, James begins his study of the "pure principle of personal identity."52 Here he comes directly against one of the most difficult problems of his psychology, a problem which had divided all previous psychologists into two irreconcilable camps. On the one side were the "spiritualists," who held either a substantial soul or a transcendental principle of identity; on the other side, the "associationists," who denied this principle, and held that all it amounted to was a stream of passing thoughts. James saw difficulties in both positions: the former gave no positive account of what the soul or the transcendental principle might be; the latter contradicted the commonsense of all mankind.53

50 Ibid., 323.
51 Ibid., 324.
52 Ibid., 330.
53 Ibid., 330.
James recognized the difficulty of the investigation, for he states: "The I, or 'pure ego,' is a very much more difficult subject of inquiry than the Me. It is that which at any given moment is conscious, whereas the Me is only one of the things which it is conscious of." If this I, or thinker, is only the stream of thought, then how explain its unity? If it is something deeper and less mutable, just what is it? In his analysis of the empirical Me, James stated that "thoughts which we actually know to exist do not fly about loose, but seem to belong to some one thinker and not to another." Is there, though, continuity in this thinker? Can he say, "I am the same that I was yesterday"? The empirical self, granted, is essentially the same in the sense that it is continuous. This attribute of continuity gives to the self "the unity of mere connectedness or unbrokenness, a perfectly definite phenomenal thing . . . ." Can the same be said of the thinker? Or is there such a thing? To this last question James replies, "That there is such a principle is the reigning doctrine of both philosophy and common sense, and yet reflection finds it difficult to

justify the idea."57 In this dilemma he turned to a simile for help in explaining his notion of the "thinker." According to this simile, in which he uses the figure of a herd of cattle, "the beasts were brought together into one herd because their owner found on each of them his brand."58 The owner here stands for that section of consciousness which recognizes and pronounces on the identity; the brand, for those characteristics which are similar and which cause the consciousness to recognize the thoughts as belonging to it. The obvious difficulty in this explanation is to explain the owner. Common sense calls for a real owner, a spiritual entity of some kind. It maintains that it is the real relation to this entity which makes the individual thoughts stick together, and that without this relation to such a real entity "their actual accretion into a 'personal consciousness' would never have taken place."59 James perceived the difficulty of having many things fuse without a medium, but he said:

\[\text{In our own account the medium is fully assigned, the herdsman is there, in the shape of something not among the things collected, but superior to them all, namely, the real, present, onlooking, remembering, judging 'thought' or identifying 'section' of the stream.}^{60}\]

57 Ibid., 202.
58 James, Principles of Psychology, I, 337.
59 Ibid., 337.
60 Ibid., 337.
But common-sense still is not satisfied. It claims that "unless the Thought have a substantial identity with a former owner--not a mere continuity or a semblance, as in our account,"61 the unity or identity of personal consciousness is not explained. Now James saw that this claim led directly to either the "soul theory" of metaphysics, or the "transcendental Ego" of Kant, and he did not want to admit either of these solutions. He therefore proposed another explanation whereby the "title" of the collective self is passed from one thought to another in some analogous way.

It is a patent fact of consciousness that a transmission like this actually occurs. Each pulse of cognitive consciousness, each thought, dies away and is replaced by another. The other, among the things it knows, knows its own predecessor, and finding it 'warm,' in the way we have described, greets it, saying: 'Thou art mine, and part of the same self with me.' Each later thought, knowing and including thus the thoughts which went before, is the final receptacle--and appropriating them is the final owner--of all they contain and own.62 James feels that this explanation answers satisfactorily, without recourse to an Ego or to a soul, the problem of personal identity, and provides, moreover, the solution on the phenomenal level. Thus, instead of an Ego or a soul, we have a "section" of the stream of consciousness standing as representative of the entire past stream, to be enveloped, in turn, by a subsequent

61 Ibid., 338.
62 Ibid., 339.
"section" of the same stream. The only difficulty which remains to be answered is just how one section of the stream of thought appropriates its predecessors. James both expresses this difficulty and answers it in the following passage:

A thing cannot appropriate itself; it is itself; and still less can it disown itself. There must be an agent of the appropriating and disowning; but that agent we have already named. It is the Thought to whom the various 'constituents' are known. That Thought is a vehicle of choice as well as of cognition; and among the choices it makes are those appropriations, or repudiations, of its 'own.'

His conclusion is, then, that "the passing thought seems to be the thinker; and though there may be another non-phenomenal thinker behind that, so far we do not seem to need him to express the facts." This position having been formulated, James takes up and denies in turn the "spiritualist" theory, which holds that the soul is a substantial, immaterial agent of psychic activity; the associationist theory, which holds that the "soul" is only a series of separate but related ideas; and the transcendentalist theory of Kant, which holds that the soul is an unknown \( X \), functioning above the pure Ego, but unknown by it.

Thus by a strictly empirical approach, James has analyzed the process of thinking. His position may be stated briefly as the following: The stream of thought, a personal,
active, selective process, which reduces the "undistinguishable, swarming continuum" to an orderly, intelligible world, flows on without interruption in each of us. The passing thought is the only thinker, appropriating to itself the thoughts which have gone before, and being in turn appropriated by its successor.

We have seen in this chapter certain manifestations of James's artistic temperament, as, for example, his imaginative descriptions of the "stream of thought" and the "herd of cattle." We have seen the obvious influence of Darwin in the entire development of the "stream of thought" and in the analysis of its characteristics. The background influence of Descartes shows itself in James's treatment of the "spiritualist" position of the soul. He considers it as if it were a separate and separable entity, inaccessible to the empirical psychologist, and therefore something to be discarded as unnecessary for an explanation of the observable facts. James's empirical analysis of the phenomenon of thought, which resulted in the theory of the "stream of thought," was, according to Townsend, his major contribution to the field, for "he corrected the atomism of associationist psychology and discovered continuities in the mental life which Hume, with his more rigorous logic, had been unable to observe."65

This theory of the "stream of thought," however, was based on a

65 H. G. Townsend, Philosophical Ideas in the United States, New York, 1934, 141.
dualism of knower and thing known as two separate and distinct entities. In the next chapter we shall see the conflict which arose between this dualism of the psychology and the monism of James's philosophic investigations.
CHAPTER III

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

As we saw in the preceding chapter, James professed an explicit dualism of knower and thing known in his Psychology, but his allegiance was divided between this "provisional doctrine" and the philosophy which he held in reserve. As Perry says:

While his mind had become clear as to the interrelations of the parts of the stream of consciousness--their transitional and functional continuity--he was greatly troubled by the question of the relation of consciousness to the external world which it purports to know. In order to get on with his psychology, therefore, he made up his mind to shelve this question by assuming the position of dualism. However, in spite of his intention to set this epistemological question aside, it definitely influenced his thinking, and "the profession of dualism, combined with an inner tendency to monism, led to confusion and ambiguity" in many parts of the Psychology.

Added difficulties arose from James's prolonged battles with

1 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 72.
2 Ibid., 39.
3 Ibid., 73.
idealism, both Berkeleyan and Kantian. It is the opinion of Perry that "on the first issue, concerning empirical or Berkeleyan idealism, James was long of a divided mind, and it was only towards the end of his career that he could pronounce unequivocally in favor of realism." Paradoxically enough, it was during the writing of his *Psychology*, when he seems most clearly to profess extra-mental reality, that James was strongly influenced by idealism, and later, during the development of his philosophy of Radical Empiricism, when his theory of "pure experience" caused many accusations of idealism and even of solipsism, that James became an outspoken advocate of realism.

Indications of his monistic tendencies appeared early in the *Psychology*, though they were not clarified or fully developed until James began to work out systematically his philosophic ideas later in his career. His notes during the early period show that he was attracted by Spencer's formula, according to which biological and psychological phenomena are one.

4 Ibid., I, 573.
7 Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, I, 580. Perry has done a signal service for every student of James by his editing and publishing of James's private notes in his comprehensive two-volume work on James. These notes are very helpful in clarifying certain obscurities in James's published works.
in essence, both being an adjustment of "inner" to "outer" relations. After explaining Spencer's text, James says:

The synthetic construction of objectivity and subjectivity may mean that even in the most rudimentary sensation there is a dim duality, a duplex aspect; what one may call an 'immanent' side (which constitutes the fact that it is actually a sensation), and a transcendent side (which is the reference to something as known through sensation). The sensation in this view becomes the form of knowledge, the reference becomes its matter or content, and the form and the matter are inseparable. Even the minimum of feeling has them. ... I myself incline more and more to some view as this ... 8

Though this observation was written at the time when James was working on the Psychology, it constitutes a different approach and therefore is not immediately evident in that work. However, if we take a passage from the Psychology and follow James's line of reasoning closely, we shall see evidence of the trend toward monism.

In his discussion of the consciousness of self, James says, "The 'self of selves,' when carefully examined, is found to consist mainly of the collection of these peculiar motions in the head, or between the head and the throat." 9 If a generalization of this personal observation can be made, then "it would follow that our entire feeling of spiritual activity, or what commonly

8 Ibid., 581.

9 James, Principles of Psychology, I, 301; cf. Essays in Radical Empiricism, 37, for a later and more complete analysis of this 'self of selves.'
passes by that name, is really a feeling of bodily activities whose exact nature is by most men overlooked.\(^\text{10}\) The conclusion to be drawn from this hypothesis is that "the existence of this thinker would be given to us rather as a logical postulate than as that direct inner perception of spiritual activity which we naturally believe ourselves to have."\(^\text{11}\) After comparing the postulated thinker behind spiritual activity to postulated matter behind physical activity, James continues, "Between the postulated matter and the postulated thinker, the sheet of phenomena would then swing, some of them (the 'realities') pertaining more to matter, others (the fictions, opinions, and errors) pertaining more to the thinker."\(^\text{12}\) Here we see the beginning of the theory of "pure experience," the neutral monism of James's later philosophy. This "pure experience" was later described as neither physical nor mental, but just "that." It remained for the knower to make the distinction, to lead away from the "pure experience" either in the direction of the knower, or in the direction of the reality known. Perry observes:

When James spoke of having a monistic philosophy in

\(^{10}\) James, Principles of Psychology, I, 302.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 304.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 304.
reserve he meant to refer to the phenomenalism just set forth, or to some further development of it. Such a development was clearly indicated: the phenomenon or 'representation' of Renouvier construed as both subject and object, was to become the phenomenon of 'pure experience' construed as neither.14

Further indications of the monism of "pure experience" are found elsewhere in the Psychology. In one place James says, "Experience, from the very start, presents us with concreted objects, vaguely continuous with the rest of the world which envelops them in space and time, and potentially divisible into inward elements and parts."15 Again, in discussing perception, James says: "Our earliest thoughts are almost exclusively sensational. They merely give us a set of thats, or its, of subjects of discourse, with their relations not brought out."16 In still another place, the analysis of an entirely new sensation suggests a latent tendency to monism:

Is it a subjective quality of feeling, or an objective quality felt? You do not even ask the question at this point. It is simply that taste. But if a doctor hears you describe it, and says: 'Ha! now you know what heartburn is,' then it becomes a quality already existent extra mentem tuam which you in turn have come upon and

13 Ibid., 220.
14 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, I, 584.
15 James, Principles of Psychology, I, 487.
16 Ibid., II, 3.
learned. The first spaces, times, things, qualities, experienced by the child probably appear, like the first heartburn, in this absolute way, as simple beings, neither in nor out of thought.17

These sections of the Psychology seem to indicate the beginning of the later theory of "pure experience" with its neutral entities, indifferent to the distinction between subjective and objective. James, however, had not elaborated this theory at the time of the writing of the Psychology, and consequently "he did not yet feel that it afforded a secure foundation for his psychological superstructure."18

The first positive step at this time toward a monistic philosophy, and one which was entirely in harmony with the content and method of approach in the Psychology, was the rejection of the soul.

It is at all events needless for expressing the actual subjective phenomena of consciousness as they appear. We have formulated them all without its aid, by the supposition of a stream of thoughts, each substantially different from the rest, but cognitive of the rest and 'appropriative' of each other's contents.19

Having thus disposed of the first element of Descartes' res cogitans, James began to undermine the second element, namely, consciousness. In his account of the nature of "self" and our con-

17 Ibid., I, 272.
18 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 73.
19 James, Principles of Psychology, I, 344.
sciousness of "self," he describes the empirical "me," all that is left of the "subject" in his professedly dualistic psychology, in objective terms: "The words me, then, and self, so far as they arouse feeling and connote emotional worth, are objective designations, meaning all the things which have the power to produce in a stream of consciousness excitement of a certain peculiar sort."20 The following analysis of personal identity substantiates this diminution of the "subject":

The sense of our own personal identity, then, is exactly like any one of our other perceptions of sameness among phenomena. It is a conclusion grounded either on the resemblance in a fundamental respect, or on the continuity before the mind, of the phenomena compared.21

It was not, however, until many years later that James felt sufficiently sure of his theory to make explicit and outright his rejection of "consciousness":

For twenty years past I have mistrusted 'consciousness' as an entity; for seven or eight years past I have suggested its non-existence to my students, and tried to give them its pragmatic equivalent in realities of experience. It seems to me that the hour is ripe for it to be openly and universally discarded.22

This rejection of "consciousness" might seem absurd at first glance, for no one can deny that thoughts exist. James clarifies

20 Ibid., 319.
21 Ibid., 341.
22 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 3.
his statement by saying, "I mean only to deny that the word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function." That function is knowing. It is to explain this function that we have been accustomed to use the term "consciousness," that element of the res cogitans which performs the function of knowing. Now what we call "consciousness" is not such an entity, but is a capacity or quality which parts of experience have of being known. The attributes of subject and object, of thought and thing, are merely practical distinctions arising from their function, not from their being.

There is . . . no aboriginal stuff or quality of being, contrasted with that of which material objects are made, out of which our thoughts of them are made; but there is a function in experience which thoughts perform, and for the performance of which this quality of being is invoked. That function is knowing.

Now that James has rejected the traditional explanation of the process of knowing, he feels himself obliged to provide in some way for that function's being carried on. It is for this reason that he proposes his monism of "pure experience":

My thesis is that if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call

23 Ibid., 3.
24 Ibid., 232.
25 Ibid., 4.
that stuff 'pure experience,' then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter. The relation itself is a part of pure experience; one of its 'terms' becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge, the knower; the other becomes the object known.26

Hence experience in the instant field of the present is only potentially either subjective or objective. Obviously these are but functional attributes, and are numerically the same in the state of pure experience.27

It is by means of this hypothesis that James intends to solve the fundamental problem of epistemology: how is it possible for one thing to be in two places simultaneously? All previous attempts at solving this problem had been based on a dualism of knower and thing known as the minimum possible in any act of cognition. On the contrary, James says, "Experience . . . has no such inner duplicity; and the separation of it into consciousness and content comes, not by way of subtraction, but by way of addition."28 In order to bring out his point more clearly, he uses a mathematical analogy:

The puzzle of how the one identical room can be in two places is at bottom just the puzzle of how one identical point can be on two lines. It can, if it be situated at

26 Ibid., 4.
27 Ibid., 23.
28 Ibid., 9.
their intersection; and similarly, if the 'pure experience' of the room were of a place of intersection of two processes, which connected it with different groups of associates respectively, it could be counted twice over, as belonging to either group, and spoken of loosely as existing in two places, although it would remain all the time a numerically single thing.29

In spite of the explanation provided by this analogy, the question remains: just what is this "pure experience." James says, "The instant field of the present is at all times what I call the 'pure' experience."30 And again, "[I]t is plain, unqualified actuality, or existence, a simple that."31 Such a description, however, hardly satisfies the mind, and so James attempts to be more specific:

There is no general stuff of which experience at large is made. There are as many stuffs as there are 'natures' in the things experienced. . . . Experience is only a collective name for all these sensible natures, and save for time and space (and, if you like, for 'being') there appears no universal element of which all things are made.32

Needless to say, this explanation led to a great deal of misunderstanding, partly because of the difficulty inherent in such a novel concept, and partly because James never adequately distinguished between this "pure" experience and subjective or con-

29 Ibid., 4.
30 Ibid., 23.
31 Ibid., 23.
32 Ibid., 26.
scious experience. Consequently, many who followed the development of this theory accused James of monistic idealism, and some even of solipsism. Charles Sanders Peirce, an associate of James at Harvard, and a reputable philosopher in his own right, expressed his opinion of the theory thus:

What you call 'pure experience' is not experience at all, and certainly ought to have a name. . . . It is vital for science that he who introduces a new conception should be held to have a duty imposed upon him to invent a sufficiently disagreeable series of words to express it.

James, however, merely reiterated his explanation, and continued to hold fast to the theory. It was for him the only solution to the troublesome epistemological problem because in his theory alone he saw a plausible explanation of the function of knowing. As he says:

The first great pitfall from which such a radical standing by experience will save us is an artificial conception of the relations between knower and known. Throughout the history of philosophy the subject and its object have been treated as absolutely discontinuous entities; and thereupon the presence of the latter to the former, or the 'apprehension' by the former of the latter, has assumed a paradoxical character which all sorts of theories had to be invented to overcome.

James felt that his theory, founded as it was on the empirical data of his studies in psychology, provided at least as good an

33 Ibid., 234.
34 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 388.
35 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 52.
explanation for the function of knowing as had been provided by any of the theories in the past, even though "pure experience" was admittedly rather elusive under close analysis, and contained difficulties which kept its author occupied with lengthy explanations.

The first difficulty grew out of the very notion of "pure experience." We have seen how James handled this, and also the weaknesses which he attempted in vain to explain away. In a later essay36 he made another attempt to explain in detail the nature of "pure experience." It was here that he admitted that "only new-born babes, or men in semi-coma from sleep, drugs, illnesses, or blows, may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense of a that which is not yet any definite what."37 Since this explanation carries the theory into the broader context of Radical Empiricism, it will be taken up in relation to the whole philosophic structure in the next chapter.

Another objection leveled was against the tenet of "pure experience" that thought and thing are numerically the same, that subjectivity and objectivity are only functional attributes, realized only when the experience is "taken," i.e., "considered along with its two differing contexts respectively, by a new

36 Ibid., 92, "The Thing and Its Relations."
37 Ibid., 94.
retrospective experience, of which that whole past complication now forms the fresh content." If this is so, the objection runs, "how comes it that its attributes should differ so fundamentally in the two takings? As thing, the experience is extended; as thought, it occupies no space or place." James begins his refutation of this objection by the question, "Are thought and thing as heterogeneous as is commonly said?" Then he describes the elements which they have in common, such as time, parts, simplicity, or complexity. Both can be described. Both are extended, though mental extension is relative to the context. He substantiates this by reference to the psychological data on perception, and says that "psychology books are full of facts that make for the essential homogeneity of thought with thing." The only sure way which we have of distinguishing the two are by their consequences: real objects always have consequences, whereas mental objects do not.

38 Ibid., 27.
39 Ibid., 27.
40 Ibid., 28.
41 Ibid., 30.
42 Ibid., 29.
43 Ibid., 33.
One final objection which warrants serious consideration is that of two or more minds knowing one thing. How can a unit of "pure experience" enter into and figure in two diverse streams of consciousness without turning itself into the two units of a dualistic psychology? After examining the question carefully, James says:

There is a way; and the first step towards it is to see more precisely how the unit enters into either one of the streams of consciousness alone. Just what, from being 'pure,' does its becoming 'conscious' once mean?\(^44\)

In order to bring out his solution more clearly, James takes the example of a pen. The pen in itself is "pure experience," and figures in a "conscious" life only insofar as it has been appropriated.

That pen, virtually both objective and subjective, is at its own moment actually and intrinsically neither. It has to be looked back upon and used in order to be classed in either distinctive way. But its use, so called, is in the hands of the other experience, while it stands, throughout the operation, passive and unchanged.\(^45\)

Now if the pen remains unchanged when appropriated by one stream of consciousness, no new condition would have to be supplied when it was appropriated by two or more streams of consciousness.

The two acts would interfere neither with one another nor with the originally pure pen. It would sleep undisturbed in its own past, no matter how many such successors went through their several appropriative acts.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 128.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 130.
Each would know it as 'my' percept, each would class it as a 'conscious' fact. 46

Hence James concludes by way of answer to the difficulty:

The paradox of the same experience figuring in two consciousnesses seems thus no paradox at all. To be 'conscious' means not simply to be, but to be reported, known, to have awareness of one's being added to that being; and this is just what happens when the appropria-tive experience supervenes. The pen-experience in its original immediacy is not aware of itself, it simply is, and the second experience is required for what we call awareness of it to occur. 47

In conclusion, then, we have seen in this chapter the recurrence of James's repressed philosophic ideas in the text of his Psychology, and the development of the psychological theories away from the traditional dualism of mind-matter to a monistic theory of pure experience. "Pure experience," as considered in this chapter, was the outgrowth of a subconscious application of the principles of Radical Empiricism to the field of psychology; subconscious, it seems, because James had expressly set aside his philosophic speculations in order to complete his Psychology. Nevertheless, his elimination of the soul and his diminution of the "self" in this work definitely paved the way for the establishment of the theory of pure experience. This theory was at the same time James's solution to the epistemological problem and a fundamental principle in his philosophy of Radical Empiricism.

46 Ibid., 131.
47 Ibid., 132.
CHAPTER IV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF RADICAL EMPIRICISM

Toward the end of his life, James saw the need for some systematic exposition of his final philosophic position. He began to collect articles which had been published earlier and to group them under the title "Essays in Radical Empiricism," but he died before this project was completely carried out. It was left to Ralph Barton Perry to bring together in one volume a series of essays which treat of James's final position.

When we speak of the "philosophy" of William James, we do not refer to a closed system of ideas, deduced from one or more fundamental principles and standing as one integrated whole. As Perry well says: "The philosophy of William James cannot be forced within the bounds of any orderly system. He had no interest in intellectual architecture; he was an explorer, and not a surveyor or map maker." Radical Empiricism, therefore, should

1 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, preface by Ralph Barton Perry, III.

2 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, I, 449.
be called a philosophic attitude or approach rather than a closed system or definite doctrine, and it is characteristic of all of James's writings, though it was enunciated as such only toward the close of his career.

Although traces of Radical Empiricism are, as we have seen, found in the Psychology, the first explicit mention of this approach is found in The Will to Believe, where James says:

It has seemed to me that these addresses might now be worthy of collection in a volume, as they shed explanatory light upon each other, and taken together express a tolerably definite philosophic attitude in a very untechnical way.

Were I obliged to give a short name to the attitude in question, I should call it that of radical empiricism, in spite of the fact that such brief nicknames are nowhere more misleading than in philosophy. I say 'empiricism,' because it is contented to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience; and I say 'radical,' because it treats the doctrine of monism itself as an hypothesis, and, unlike so much of the halfway empiricism that is current under the name of positivism or agnosticism or scientific naturalism, it does not dogmatically affirm monism as something with which all experience has got to square. 3

A few years later, in a letter to the Italian translator of his Psychology, James mentioned this "philosophic attitude" as his predominant interest:

I am interested in a metaphysical system ("Radical Empiricism") which has been forming itself within me, more interested, in fact, than I have ever been in anything else; but it is very difficult to get it into shape for

---

3 James, The Will to Believe, New York, 1931, preface, viii; first edition published in 1897.
any connected exposition; and, though it contains very practical elements, I find it almost impossible to put it into popular form.4

At the time of the writing of this letter, February, 1905, James had already published two of the most important articles on his "metaphysical system," namely, "Does Consciousness Exist?"5 and "A World of Pure Experience."6 In the latter he states:

I give the name of 'radical empiricism' to my Weltschauung. Empiricism is known as the opposite of rationalism. Rationalism tends to emphasize universals and to make wholes prior to parts in the order of logic as well as in that of being. Empiricism, on the contrary, lays the explanatory stress upon the part, the element, the individual, and treats the whole as a collection and the universal as an abstraction.7

4 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 387.

5 Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods, I, September 1, 1904, No. 15.

6 Ibid., September 29, 1904, No. 20.

7 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 41; Perry gives a good analysis of empiricism in the following: "Empiricism is fundamentally the doctrine according to which the truth of knowledge depends in the last analysis on the contingent existence of that which is claimed to be known. One may think ever so clearly and ever so necessarily—that in itself proves nothing. There remains the crucial evidence, which is the testimony of eye-witnesses who are themselves in possession of the ultimate evidence, which is the testimony of the 'facts' themselves. Thus, for example, I judge that crows are black. According to the empirical theory, it suffices, in order that this judgment shall be correct, that a black crow shall present itself. Whether the blackness of crows is logically necessary . . . is of secondary importance: according to empiricism, the appearance of one or more black crows cuts short the argument and definitely settles the matter." Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, I, 452.
In this article James explains more fully what he means by the qualifying adjective "radical." The older British empiricists—Locke, Berkeley, and Hume—had tried to analyze knowledge in terms of simple sensations and then to reconstruct it out of these components. By thus stressing the disjunctive aspect of experience and neglecting the conjunctive, they were forced to supply some artificial connective to explain the relations between any two sensations. These "connectives" were later attacked by the idealist critics of empiricism, and it was precisely because of their evident weakness that the idealists, or rationalists as James often called them, resorted to such trans-empirical agents as substances, souls, and intellectual categories. 8 Now James maintained that if these empiricists had taken everything in experience, conjunctions as well as disjunctions, there would have been no need for such artificial connectives. 9 Therefore he laid great stress on the presence of relations in experience, and on the basis of these relations, as we shall see later in an analysis of the basic tenets of Radical Empiricism, he developed his own version of empiricism.

8 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 43; on this point, cf. the introductory essay to William James by Paul Henle of the University of Michigan, in Classic American Philosophers, Max H. Fisch, Ed., New York, 1951, 121.

9 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 44.
With this general description of the tenets of Radical Empiricism before us, it will be helpful at this point to distinguish between James's position and other expressions of this "systematic way of handling questions" which developed simultaneously and were often confused with it. James himself, at least in his early period of philosophic writing, preferred to consider the positions of Dewey and Schiller to be different from his own merely in approach or in emphasis. As Perry says:

In the Preface to The Meaning of Truth James undertook to represent the views of Dewey, Schiller, and himself as complementary rather than conflicting. Schiller's universe was 'psychological,' his own 'epistemological,' and as for Dewey's—it was the 'widest of the three,' but he refrained from giving his own account of its complexity.

10 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 531; cf. James's preface to The Meaning of Truth.

11 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 514; Perry offers in this section an interesting comparison between James and Dewey: "Dewey's pragmatism or 'instrumentalism' is more single-minded than that of James. He is primarily concerned with the analysis of the cognitive process. He is not satisfied with general statements of its essentially practical character, but undertakes a meticulous examination of its structure."

12 Ibid., II, 494; cf. Perry, Philosophy of the Recent Past, 195: "In England the leading exponent of this school is F. C. S. Schiller. He calls this philosophy 'humanism,' in order to emphasize the dependence of knowledge and truth on human nature and on the moral and religious demands."

13 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 531; Perry says here that James was inclined to term Dewey's approach "ontological" but refrained because of Dewey's objection to this term.
James was inclined to minimize the differences since his writings contained a wide variety of ideas which were not logically connected with the matter under discussion, whereas Dewey recognized the differences as more fundamental.14

Another term which has frequently been used in relation to Radical Empiricism is pragmatism. In his preface to the work Pragmatism, James distinguished between the two when he said:
"There is no logical connection between pragmatism, as I understand it, and a doctrine which I have recently set forth as 'radical empiricism.' The latter stands on its own feet. One may entirely reject it and still be a pragmatist."15 He felt, however, that "the establishment of the pragmatist theory of truth is a step of first-rate importance in making radical empiricism prevail."16 From this it seems that James looked upon pragmatism as an adjunct to the more complete philosophic approach of Radical Empiricism. This opinion is confirmed by his comment in another place: "It seems to me that if radical empiricism is good for anything, it ought, with its pragmatic method and its principle of pure experience, to be able to avoid such tangles,

---

14 Ibid., II, 514.
15 James, Pragmatism, New York, 1912, preface, ix.
16 James, The Meaning of Truth, preface, xii.
or at least to simplify them somewhat."

Turning now from our general study of Radical Empiricism and its relation to the doctrines of Dewey and Schiller to a more detailed study of its basic tenets, we find the only explicit statement by James in the preface to The Meaning of Truth. Radical Empiricism consists first of a postulate: "That the only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience." James admits that there may be things of an unexperienced nature, but these should form no part of the material for philosophic debate. The application of this postulate is evident in his treatment of the soul in the Psychology, where he says, "The Soul-theory is, then, a complete superfluous, so far as accounting for the actually

17 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 159. James here explains what he means by pragmatism: "The pragmatic method starts from the postulate that there is no difference of truth that doesn't make a difference of fact somewhere; and it seeks to determine the meaning of all differences of opinion by making the discussion hinge as soon as possible upon some practical or particular issue." Pragmatism, taken in this sense, is closely allied to Radical Empiricism. Hence Paul Henle says in his introduction to William James: "In his thought, unquestionably, radical empiricism is an outgrowth of the pragmatic method. . . ." Classic American Philosophers, Max H. Fisch, ed., 121.

18 James, The Meaning of Truth, preface, xii; this statement of James is quoted by Perry in his introduction to Essays in Radical Empiricism which he edited after James's death. The postulate is obviously directed against those whom James termed "rationalists," and is meant to insure the fundamentally empirical character of his philosophy.
verified facts of conscious experience goes." It is to be noted that he does not claim to have established the non-existence of the soul, but only to have shown that, for scientific purposes, it is not necessary to explain the facts of experience. For James, therefore, it is no longer matter for philosophic discussion. It may exist, or it may not, but since it cannot be defined in terms drawn from experience it will not be considered. He clarifies this point later when he says:

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced.

When attacked on this point by Mr. Pitkin, an "absolutist" critic, James identifies this statement of his as a "methodological postulate, not a conclusion supposed to flow from the intrinsic absurdity of transempirical objects."

---

19 James, Principles of Psychology, I 348.
20 Ibid., I, 350.
21 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 42.
22 Ibid., 241: argument against an article by W. B. Pitkin, "A Problem of Evidence in Radical Empiricism," published in the Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods, III, November 22, 1906, No. 24. As Schneider comments on this point: "To clear the decks of non-empirical, 'metaphysical' problems, he devised pragmatism; it was intended to facilitate and clarify 'philosophical discussion.' Unfortunately, it did the opposite; it became one more bone of contention and one more scheme for 'justifying' unverifiable faiths." A History of American Philosophy, by Herbert W. Schneider, New York, 1946, 540.
Radical Empiricism consists, secondly, of a statement of fact: "That the relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct particular experience as the things themselves."23 It is in this statement that James departs radically from traditional empiricism, for here he asserts that the relations between things, as well as the things themselves, are immediately perceptible in experience. This assertion is a development of the opinion first expressed in the Psychology: "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."24 He goes on to say, as we have already indicated, that not only are there feelings of color and of cold, but there are also feelings of if, of next, of by. Language has recognized the former, but has consistently refused to recognize the latter, and in this refusal lies the tendency to accentuate and isolate more and more the substantive parts of experience, and thus bring about serious difficulties in relating these parts which have been isolated. James says:

When a common man analyzes certain what's from out the stream of experience, he understands their distinctness

23 James, The Meaning of Truth, preface, xii.
24 James, Principles of Psychology, I, 245.
as thus isolated, but this does not prevent him from equally well understanding their combination with each other as originally experienced in the concrete, or their confluence with new sensible experiences in which they recur as 'the same.' Returning into the stream of sensible presentation, nouns and adjectives, and that and abstract whats, grow confluent again, and the word 'is' names all these experiences of conjunction. 25

Finally, the generalized conclusion is expressed in the following manner: "The parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience. The directly apprehended universe needs, in short, no extraneous trans-empirical connective support, but possesses in its own right a concatenated or continuous structure." 26 What James means here is that there is no need for supposing a substratum of matter, as Locke did; nor a substratum of spirit, as Berkeley did; nor a "consciousness in general" with Kant; nor an Absolute Mind with Hegel and the absolute idealists; nor an Unknowable with Spencer. 27 The only reality is that which is immediately

25 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 117.

26 James, The Meaning of Truth, preface, xii; cf. Essays in Radical Empiricism, 107; "Radical empiricism takes conjunctive relations at their face value, holding them to be as real as the terms united by them. The world it represents as a collection, some parts of which are conjunctively and others dis-junctively related. . . . Such determinately various hanging-together may be called concatenated union, to distinguish it from the 'through-and-through' type of union, 'each in all and all in each,' . . . which monistic systems hold to obtain when things are taken in their absolute reality."

experienceable: concrete things and their relations.

In all this, the continuities and the discontinuities are absolutely co-ordinate matters of immediate feeling. The conjunctions are as primordial elements of 'fact' as are the distinctions and disjunctions. Prepositions, copulas, and conjunctions, 'is,' 'isn't,' 'then,' 'before,' 'in,' 'on,' 'beside,' 'between,' 'next,' 'like,' 'unlike,' 'as,' 'but,' flower out of the stream of pure experience, the stream of concretes or the sensational stream, as naturally as nouns and adjectives do, and they melt into it again as fluidly when we apply them to a new portion of the stream.28

The direct corollary of the generalized conclusion is obviously a theory of neutral monism. What James actually did was to expand his psychological theory of the "stream of thought," i.e., of continuity in consciousness, to a metaphysical theory of continuity in being, which he called "pure experience." As Schneider says, "He conceived of the common world in which we exist as both things and thinkers as 'a world of pure experience,' a world of experience which is, at the same time, no one's experience exclusively."29 Having eliminated both the soul and consciousness from his epistemology, James was forced to provide some explanation for the function of knowing. He found his explanation, and at the same time the solution to the epistemological problem, in the theory of "pure experience."30

28 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 95.
29 Schneider, A History of American Philosophy, 544.
30 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 388.
James's difficulties, however, were by no means over. He describes these in a series of lectures which were later published under the title A Pluralistic Universe. The crux of the difficulties lay in what he perceived to be a conflict between a fundamental point in his psychology and an equally fundamental point in his philosophy. In the Psychology he had rejected the compounding of consciousness, and had maintained that "every complex mental fact is a separate psychic entity, succeeding upon a lot of other psychic entities which are erroneously called its parts, and superseding them in function, but not literally being composed of them."31 In his later theory of "pure experience," he was definitely committed to the view that reality and the field of consciousness were one and the same. This implied, as Perry observes, "that portions of the field could be common to two or more minds; that they could, in other words, be identical parts of different conscious wholes."32 James kept a diary of his attempted solutions to this problem for a period of over two and a half years, beginning in the autumn of 1905. Referring to this account, he said, "Sincerely, and patiently as I could, I struggled with the problem for years, covering hundreds of sheets.

31 James, A Pluralistic Universe, 205.
32 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Briefer Version, 331.
of paper with notes and memoranda and discussions with myself over the difficulty."

The fundamental difficulty here was the fact that in his Psychology James had emphasized the uniqueness and indivisibility of the individual stream of thought. Each passing thought in the flowing stream appropriated its predecessors to itself and was, in turn, appropriated by its successor. It was unique in the sense that the exact thought could never be repeated in any future context. Perry makes the following observation on this point:

James could then take this view without prejudice to the existence of a common and permanent world because of his distinction between thoughts and their objects, the latter possessing the commonness and permanence which the former lacked. But now he had definitely renounced dualism, and in place of thoughts and things there were only 'experiences.' If these possessed the uniqueness and indivisibility of thoughts, they must lose the commonness and permanence of things; and there would remain only the desperate alternative of solipsism. If, on the other hand, they possessed the commonness and permanence of things, then they could never enter directly into a uniquely individual conscious experience. How to conceive experience so that it could retain both sets of properties, composing both the immediate and the transient life of the subject and the stable world of common objects—that was James's problem.

In this predicament James realized that one of his positions had

33 James, A Pluralistic Universe, 207.

34 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 393.
to be abandoned.

I saw that I must either forswear that 'psychology without a soul' to which my whole psychological and kantian education had committed me, -- I must, in short, bring back distinct spiritual agents to know the mental states, now singly and now in combination, . . . or else I must squarely confess the solution of the problem impossible, and then either give up my intellectualist logic, the logic of identity, and adopt some higher (or lower) form of rationality, or, finally, face the fact that life is logically irrational.35

He decided definitely to eliminate the first possible solution, the acceptance of a soul, because, "like the word 'cause,' the word 'soul' is but a theoretic stop-gap -- it marks a place and claims for it a future explanation."36 In the resulting dilemma: on the one hand to give up the logic of identity, and on the other hand to believe that human experience is fundamentally irrational, James chose to give up the logic of identity. The reason for this decision was that "reality, life, experience, concreteness, immediacy, use what word you will, exceeds our logic, overflows and surrounds it."37 The predominant influence in making this decision was, as he said, his reading of Henri Bergson.

If I had not read Bergson, I should probably still be blackening endless pages of paper privately, in the hope of making ends meet that were never meant to meet, and trying to discover some mode of conceiving the behavior

35 James, A Pluralistic Universe, 208.
36 Ibid., 210.
37 Ibid., 212.
of reality which should leave no discrepancy between it and the accepted laws of the logic of identity.  

After reading Bergson, James saw clearly that he had fallen into the dilemma in which he found himself through the intellectualist error of considering two abstractions apart from the concrete reality in which they are found, and thus constructing logical difficulties and oppositions which are not found in the reality concretely considered. Therefore, James says, "I have finally found myself compelled to give up the logic, fairly, squarely, and irrevocably," for "reality obeys a higher logic, or enjoys a higher rationality." 

Specifically, James's difficulty was the impossibility of understanding how 'your' experience and 'mine,' which 'as such' are defined as not conscious

---

38 Ibid., 214; Bergson's influence on James consisted mainly in his strong attacks on "intellectualism." According to James, intellectualist abuses began when "Socrates and Plato taught that what a thing really is, is told us by its definition." Ibid., 213. "So first we identify the things with the concept, and then we identify the concept with a definition, and only then, inasmuch as the thing is whatever the definition expresses, are we sure of apprehending the real essence of it, or the full truth about it." Ibid., 218. "... it is at this point that the misuse of concepts begins through the habit of employing them, not to assign properties to things, but to deny the very properties with which the things sensibly present themselves. When the logician cannot extract a certain property from a definition, he is tempted to deny that the concrete object to which the definition applies can possibly possess that property." Ibid., 219.

39 Ibid., 212.

40 Ibid., 213.
of each other, can nevertheless at the same time be members of a world-experience defined expressly as having all its parts co-conscious or known together.41

Enlightened by Bergson's analysis, James now saw that the problem of how a thing can be its own "other" was merely the misuse of logic, and that, in reality taken concretely,

sensational experiences are their 'own others' . . . both internally and externally. Inwardly they are one with their parts, and outwardly they pass continuously into their next neighbors, so that events separated by years of time in a man's life hang together unbrokenly by the intermediary events. Their names, to be sure, cut them into separate conceptual entities, but no cuts existed in the continuum in which they originally came.42

Thus the psychological-metaphysical problem was settled. There still remained, however, the psychological-epistemological problem over the compounding of the states of consciousness. This was a ramification of the first problem, but contained its own particular difficulties, and its own distinct, though related, solution.

From the notes resulting from the Bode-Miller controversy we learn that James clearly recognized a contradiction between his psychology and his philosophy.

In my psychology I contended that each field of consciousness is entitatively a unit, and that its parts

41 Ibid., 221.

42 Ibid., 285; cf. also 271: "This is just what we mean by the stream's sensible continuity. No element there cuts itself off from any other element, as concepts cut themselves off from concepts."
are only different cognitive relations which it may possess with different contexts. But in my doctrine that the same 'pen' may be known by two knowers I seem to imply that an identical part can help to constitute two fields. Bode and Miller both pick up the contradiction. The fields are . . . decomposable into 'parts,' one of which, at least, is common to both; and my whole tirade against 'composition' in the Psychology is belied by my own subsequent doctrine.

The point at issue here is how two fields can be units if they contain this common part. James puzzled over this problem for months before he suddenly came upon a possible source. He asked himself, "May not my whole trouble be due to the fact that I am still treating what is really a living and dynamic situation by logical and statical categories?" At this time he was not yet convinced that he was involved in such a contradiction as would necessitate the changing of either his psychology or his philosophy, for he says:

The radical empiricist deals with the question 'of what is experience made?' while the psychological reflector deals with that of 'how it comes about.' The one takes a static, the other a dynamic point of view. They need not, therefore, be exactly congruent.

Then he took up the "pen-problem" and the "Fechner-problem" to-

43 I.e., pure experience.
44 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 750.
45 Ibid., 760.
46 Ibid., 760.
gether, i.e., the question of how the same percept may be an aspect of both physical and mental entities and also how the same percept may be an element of more than one consciousness. To the problem of how any term can singly and immediately be both in and ex another term, he answers that they may be

... by 'functioning' plurally. But functioning means having relations; and to solve this problem the relations must be external. Yet in the particular cases concerning us, it would seem that they could hardly be external if my chapters on mind-stuff and on the stream of consciousness are correct.47

Having thus cast some doubt on his theories of psychology, James turned to his theory of "pure experience" and the question of how the same percept, the pen (in his example), may be an aspect of both physical and mental entities. After a careful analysis, he says:

The difficulties come only when for the seen pen is substituted the fixed logical term 'pen,' and when this is treated as an absolute or indivisible unit that 'moveth altogether if it move at all.'48

The difficulties, then, arise from the use of terms, such as "pen," abstractly, apart from their context in the stream of experience.

These terms cannot possibly have absolute logical values, irrelevant to and contradictory of the experiences from

47 Ibid., 760.
48 Ibid., 761.
which they are derived, and within which their consequences actually evolve. 49

Here again we see the influence of Bergson. By now James began to realize that in this problem too he had fallen into "intellectualism," and so tells himself: "Don't cleave to your physical verbal symbol abstractly and literally, but reinterpret it by your immediate experiential fact." 50 Re-examining the double aspect of his problem in the light of this mandate, he says:

The 'pen,' as a living real, is the name of a business center, a 'firm.' It has many customers, my mind, e.g., and the physical world. To call it the same pen both times would mean that although my mind and the physical world can and may eventually figure in one and the same transaction, they need not do so . . . and that in respect of this particular pen-experience neither counts in the transaction which the other is carrying on. Neither is counted by the other, neither is for the other. 51

Turning then to the "Fechner-problem," he says:

Now take a mental 'state' and trace the possibility of its being 'part' of a wider mental state of which it knows nothing. The it here is both co and ex the same thing. Psychologically we know that such things do obtain . . . but how can they? 52

With this question in mind, James now looks for other facts in which the same condition of non-reciprocity in relation is found.

---

49 Ibid., 761.
50 Ibid., 761.
51 Ibid., 764.
52 Ibid., 764.
Experience presents examples of it wherever there is direction in the relation. Things are not mutually later, higher, between, etc. Remembrance is not mutual. Why need 'consciousness' be mutual?53

Here lies the core of the difficulty. If consciousness is not mutual, there is no problem about its being co and ex the same thing. James had based his assumption that consciousness is mutual on the principle which he laid down in his Psychology that "mental facts are as they appear, and can't 'appear' in two ways to themselves."54 Since this principle is now found to be unverified by fact, James is forced to change the position formerly maintained. He now states:

Mental facts can (in spite of my Principles of Psychology) compound themselves, if you take them concretely and livingly, as possessed of various functions. They can count variously, figure in different constellations, without ceasing to be 'themselves.'55

In concluding this chapter, let us briefly recapitulate the development of James's philosophy. We have seen that his Radical Empiricism manifested a thoroughly empirical approach. He took reality to be just what it seems to be from experience, namely, "that distributed and strung-along and flowing sort of

53 Ibid., 765.

54 Ibid., 765; cf. James, Principles of Psychology, I, 158.

55 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 765.
reality which we finite beings swim in." Such a notion is obviously patterned after his psychological doctrine of the "stream of thought" in its characteristics, and its outstanding features are those which ordinary logic rejects. James found himself involved in logical contradictions which seemed insoluble until, under the influence of Bergson, he recognized that they were the result of an "intellectualist" misuse of abstracted concepts and that the only solution was a return to the original concrete experiences from which they had been taken. On closer examination of these facts of experience, James found that he had been mistaken in his Psychology in the matter of compounding of consciousness, and therefore he modified his psychological position to conform with the more recently discovered facts.

56 James, A Pluralistic Universe, 213.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Any attempt to reduce the writings of William James to a coherent and systematic philosophic structure is fraught with difficulties, for he had no such structure. As Paul Henle says:

If by a system of philosophy is meant fitting everything in the universe into its proper logically demarcated compartment, James has no system of philosophy. In this sense he hated system and his own picture of the world leaves it full of loose ends and uncompleted processes.1

As we have seen, James was by nature, background, and education an explorer, not a "map maker." With his radical empiricist approach he appealed first, last, and always to experience: that continually changing flux which reveals ever new aspects and possibilities. James himself never completed, nor wished to complete, what could properly be called a system of philosophy. His ideas are expressed for the most part in short articles or published series of lectures, and his medium was the popular style of colloquial English. Though he was often criticized by the more scientific minded of his colleagues for using such a style,

1 Classic American Philosophers, ed. by Max H. Fisch; introduction to William James by Paul Henle, 124.
he deemed it necessary because he was writing largely for listeners, not for readers. His fine sense of judging the capacity of an audience resulted in his attaining "a vogue and influence almost unique among philosophical writers," but it also resulted in much obscurity and confusion for those serious students of philosophy who were more interested in the thought than in attractive expression. James was aware of this obscurity, and often expressed his intention of writing a systematic metaphysics in technical form for his colleagues and for advanced students. The following excerpt from a letter dated August, 1902, states:
"I now want it possible to write something serious, systematic, and syllogistic; I've had enough of the squashy popular-lecture style..." In spite of this desire, however, continual invitations to lecture postponed the project, and though he heartily disliked lecturing, he usually accepted the invitations. As he says in a letter to Schiller after the request to deliver the Hibbert Lectures at Oxford had reached him:

I accepted because I was ashamed to refuse a professional challenge of that importance, but I would it hadn't come to me. I actually hate lecturing; and this job condemns me to publish another book written in picturesque and popular style when I was settling down to something whose manner would be more strengwissenschaftlich, i.e., concise, dry, and impersonal. My free and easy style in

2 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 364.

3 Ibid., II, 338.
Pragmatism has made me so many enemies in academic and pedantic circles that I hate to go on increasing their number, and want to become tighter instead of looser.4

The only articles which even approached the description of "dry, concise, and impersonal" were those published after his death in the volume Essays in Radical Empiricism. In the opinion of the editor of the work, these essays set forth "systematically and within brief compass the doctrine of 'radical empiricism';"5 and were designed "not as a collection but rather as a treatise,"6 for "not only were most of them written consecutively within a period of two years, but they contain numerous cross-references."7 Notwithstanding this close relationship, these essays leave much to be desired for an all-inclusive statement of James's philosophy. Some of the essays, it is true, show a consecutive development of thought, though others are merely a restatement or a clarification of ideas already expressed. The essays express the main tenets of Radical Empiricism, but they do not give the full details of this approach, nor do they link Radical Empiricism with James's positions in psychology, pragmatism, or cosmology.8 It is highly doubtful that James would ever have formu-

4 Ibid., II, 582.
5 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, preface, vi.
6 Ibid., preface, vi.
7 Ibid., preface, ix.
8 A Pluralistic Universe develops his cosmology.
lated a system of philosophy in the strict sense of the word, since both his nature and his approach to philosophy militated against such a structure. His intention seems to have been to make at least a summary sketch of his final positions and their relations to one another. He might have gone further and traced the development of his thought over a period of some thirty years, showing clearly his consecutive positions and their relation to the conclusions in the various fields which he had investigated. The fact remains, however, that James accomplished none of this, and the task is left to his followers to formulate, to the best of their ability, some picture of his philosophy as a whole. Since such a picture is essential for a thorough understanding of James, we will now give a brief sketch of the principal trends in his works from the time of the writing of the Psychology until the publication of A Pluralistic Universe. The work Essays in Radical Empiricism, though published posthumously, was written by James between the years 1884 and 1906.

The reduction of the consecutive positions of James to an orderly presentation would be a challenge to the author himself, so great is the diversity not only in the positions themselves but also in the fields in which these positions were developed. If we were to look for a key, for one word which could be used to characterize all of these positions, that word would be "experience." James appealed throughout his life to experience, despite the fact that for many years he was a con-
firmed idealist, for his early training in the tradition of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume drew him into the camp of the Berkeleian idealists. While still professing this idealism, he took the position of dualism in his Psychology. We have seen, however, that his philosophic bent, both before and after the publication of that work, was toward a kind of monism, the seeds of which are found in various sections of the Psychology. These early indications of monism were, strictly speaking, a "phenomenism," somewhat similar to that of Renouvier and Mach, though not derived from their position. After eliminating both the "soul" and the "self" as entities in his psychological position, James was ready to deny "consciousness" as an entity, and thus clear the way for the announcement of his neutral monism of "pure experience." At this time he definitely shifted his allegiance from Berkeleian idealism to realism:

With transition and prospect thus enthroned in pure experience, it is impossible to subscribe to the idealism of the English school. Radical empiricism has, in fact,

9 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 364.

10 James, Principles of Psychology, I, 218.

11 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 390: "James's view of experience, then, was not derived from contemporary positivism any more than from Renouvier. It was in agreement with a general tendency of the times; and it was the culmination of a tendency which had governed his own thought from early years."
more affinities with natural realism than with the views of Berkeley or of Mill, and this can be easily shown.12

This monism of "pure experience" now became his dominant interest, and was characteristic of much of his later philosophy. We must keep in mind, however, that it was a monism only in the epistemological sense of a denial of the dualism of subject-object in the act of cognition. Furthermore, James held strenuously that it was based on realism, not on idealism. He considered the monistic idealists, such as Lotze, Royce, and Bradley, as his chief adversaries. As Perry says:

He brings the same general charge against them all, namely, that they present philosophy with a false dilemma between utter unity and utter irrelevance. Lotze argues that if two things are distinct, they cannot influence one another; Royce, that if two things are independent, they can never become interdependent; and Bradley, that if things are two they cannot be related. The conclusion is that since there is influence and relationship, implied even in bare plurality, then distinctness and independence must be abandoned; oneness must be the reality, and plurality is the mere appearance.13

Here we see the "intellectualism" which was so utterly opposed to James's empirical approach. The unity maintained by the monistic idealists was "cosmological" rather than epistemological. Hence James could, on the one hand, argue against their position that "oneness must be the reality" and support pluralism in his cos-

12 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 76.

13 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 584.
mology, and, on the other hand, maintain the neutral monism of "pure experience."

James's cosmology finds expression in the Hibbert Lectures delivered at Oxford in May of 1908, and later published under the title _A Pluralistic Universe_. Perry observes:

There are two connections between the metaphysics of _A Pluralistic Universe_ and the Pragmatism which preceded it. 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. 14

In _A Pluralistic Universe_ James stated the thesis of the lectures as "a defense of the pluralistic against the monistic views." 15 He says, "Think of the universe as existing solely in the each-form, and you will have on the whole a more reasonable and satisfactory idea of it than if you insist on the all-form being necessary." 16 This pluralistic view of the universe is obviously an application of Radical Empiricism in general and of the principle

14 Ibid., II, 585.
15 James, _A Pluralistic Universe_, 44.
16 Ibid., 44.
of "pure experience" in particular to the problem of the One and the Many. Is the world one, or is it many? Do we have a universe or a pluriverse? James answers this question in the following:

The world is One just so far as its parts hang together by any definite connexion. It is many just so far as any definite connexion fails to obtain. And finally it is growing more and more unified by those systems of connexion at least which human energy keeps framing as time goes on.17

This last reference seems to pertain to the generalized conclusion of Radical Empiricism18 in which we have the many substantive parts of the experience-continuum united by directly experienced relations, or transitive parts of experience. In this continuum experience presents itself as a "theater of simultaneous possibilities," from which the mind, feeling its way forward like an antenna, "carves out" its own intelligible world from "the

---

17 James, Pragmatism, 156.

18 Cf. James, The Meaning of Truth, preface, xii: "The parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience. The directly apprehended universe needs, in short, no extraneous trans-empirical connective support, but possesses in its own right a concatenated or continuous structure." Cf. also Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 590: "If James wished to escape the practical implications of monism, he was not less anxious to escape the theoretic difficulties of atomism, monadism, dualism, or any view in which unity was excluded in advance. He sought a view which permitted unity--as much as theoretic demands might require, or as the facts might yield, or as the religious consciousness might crave."
jointless continuity of space and moving clouds of swarming atoms."19 This experience-continuum is an active, dynamic, sensibly continuous flux in which "every individual morsel of the sensational stream takes up the adjacent morsels by coalescing with them,"20 and "the concrete pulses of experience . . . run into one another continuously and seem to interpenetrate. What in them is relation and what is matter related is hard to discern."21 In this experience-continuum, a "'mind' or 'personal consciousness' is the name for a series of experiences run together by certain definite transitions, and an objective reality is a series of similar experiences knit by different transitions."22

19 James, Principles of Psychology, I, 288.
20 James, A Pluralistic Universe, 271.
21 Ibid., 282.
22 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 80; cf. ibid., 44, where he discusses the various types of relations: "Relations are of different degrees of intimacy. Merely to be 'with' one another in a universe of discourse is the most external relation that terms can have, and seems to involve nothing whatever as to further consequences. Simultaneity and time-interval come next, and then space-adjacency and distance. After them, similarity and difference, carrying the possibility of many inferences. Then relations of activity, tying terms into series involving change, tendency, resistance, and the causal order generally. Finally, the relation experienced between terms that form states of mind, and are immediately conscious of continuing each other. The organization of the Self as a system of memories, purposes, strivings, fulfilments or disappointments, is incidental to this most intimate of all relations, the terms of which seem in many cases to compenetrated and suffuse each other's being."
Just as there is "no general stuff of which experience at large is made," so too there is no "aboriginal stuff or quality of being, contrasted with that of which material objects are made, out of which our thoughts of them are made." The passing thought, "which is the thinker," performs a function in experience which is called knowing. "Consciousness" is not an entity but "a kind of external relation, and does not denote a special stuff or way of being."

The peculiarity of our experiences, that they not only are, but are known, which their 'conscious' quality is invoked to explain, is better explained by their relations--these relations themselves being experiences--to one another.

The description of the passing thought appropriating to itself its predecessors and in turn being appropriated by its successors is modified later in the Essays to a "co-conscious transition . . . by which one experience passes into another when both belong to

23 Ibid., 26.
24 Ibid., 3.
25 James, Principles of Psychology, I, 342.
26 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 4.
27 Ibid., 25.
28 Ibid., 25.
the same self." It will be noted that James slips into the "dualistic" terminology of his Psychology, though he is using the word "self" here to refer to the continuity experienced when "a later moment of my experience succeeds an earlier one. . . ." He goes on to say: "Continuity here is a definite sort of experience; just as definite as is the discontinuity-experience which I find it impossible to avoid when I seek to make the transition from an experience of my own to one of yours." In his analysis of the "stream of thought," the first characteristic was that each thought is "owned." And again, "Thoughts which we actually know to exist do not fly about loose, but seem to belong to some one thinker and not to another." The similarity between these two analyses is more obvious if we take into consideration the fact that in the Psychology James was approaching the question on the psychical plane through introspection whereas in the later work he was considering the problem on the metaphysical plane through observation.

29 Ibid., 47: James says: "About the facts there is no question. My experiences and your experiences are 'with' each other in various ways, but mine pass into mine, and yours pass into yours in a way in which yours and mine never pass into one another."

30 Ibid., 49.

31 Ibid., 49.

32 James, Principles of Psychology, I, 226.

33 Ibid., 330.
Not only are an individual's thoughts continuous, but also "the objective nucleus of every man's experience, his own body" is continuous. James continues by stating his opinion that "equally continuous as a percept (though we may be inattentive to it) is the material environment of that body, changing by gradual transition when the body moves."

Thus by denying both the soul and entitative consciousness, on the one hand, and by analyzing reality according to the "stream of thought," on the other hand, James succeeded in breaking down the mind-body dichotomy into a neutral monism of "pure experience." By this theory he provided the American philosophic world with a new epistemology and a new cosmology.

One may ask: Precisely where does James stand in the American world of thought? Is he, for all his novel ideas, only another in the long line of associationists? That he did not intend to develop an entirely new position, much less to start a new "school" in opposition to the already-existing school of empiricism, seems likely from the following statement:

It [his position] is essentially a mosaic philosophy, a philosophy of plural facts, like that of Hume and his descendants, who refer these facts neither to Substances in which they adhere nor to an Absolute Mind that creates them as its objects. But it differs from the Human type of empiricism in one particular which makes me add the

34 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 65.
35 Ibid., 65.
This "one particular," as he goes on to say, is the inclusion of every directly experienced element. His chief objection to the ordinary empiricism had been its tendency to stress the disjunctive elements in experience and to ignore the conjunctive elements. It was on this very point of relations that he parted company with his associationist predecessors. As Townsend observes: "He corrected the atomism of associationist psychology and discovered continuities in the mental life which Hume, with his more rigorous logic, had been unable to observe." It was, as we have seen, the influence of Darwin and Spencer which led James to reject the "mental chemistry" of the associationist school as both untrue to the facts of introspective experience and inadequate to explain the mental processes. This rejection of psychic atomism was definite, final, and complete, and James's substitute, the "stream of thought," became for subsequent empiricists the accepted explanation of mental processes. Hence

36 Ibid., 42.

37 Townsend, Philosophical Ideas in the United States, 142. Cf. James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 42: "Berkeley's nominalism, Hume's statement that whatever things we distinguish are as 'loose and separate' as if they had 'no manner of connection,' James Mill's denial that similars have anything 'really' in common, the resolution of the causal tie into habitual sequence, John Mill's account of both physical things and selves as composed of discontinuous possibilities, and the general pulverization of all Experience by association and the mind-dust theory, are examples of what I mean."
we may say that, although James did not intend to break with his predecessors, he did in effect profoundly change the current trends both on the psychological level, with his "stream of thought," and on the metaphysical level, with his "pure experience."

A second question which might present itself is that concerning the epistemological problem. Did James actually succeed in solving that problem by his theory of "pure experience"? On this point there is such confusion, both in the writings of James himself and in the writings of his followers, that any direct answer is impossible. The theory of "pure experience" was developed, as all will grant, with one purpose in mind: that of solving the epistemological problem. This singleness of purpose seems to have been the root of the difficulties which followed the statement of the theory. If James had not been so eager to apply his theory to the problem at hand, but had taken the time to work out in detail its metaphysical implications, many of his difficulties and those of his followers would never have arisen.

The first of these difficulties is found in the very expression "pure experience." This term is open to two interpretations, metaphysical and epistemological. Taken in the metaphysical sense, "pure experience" signifies a type of pure being. Such an interpretation has been followed and developed by many members of the Neo-realist group, including Edwin B. Holt, Ralph Barton Perry, and William P. Montague. More recently, William
Savery made use of this interpretation in establishing his position on "concatenism."38 James gives definite indications which would substantiate such an interpretation when, for example, he describes "pure experience" as "plain, unqualified actuality or existence, a simple that."39 Again he says that it is "a form of being which is as yet neutral or ambiguous, and prior to the object and subject distinction."40 In this sense, "pure experience" seems to be similar to the scholastic concept of "being"; and if James had developed this novel insight, it would have given him a much-needed metaphysical foundation for his resultant philosophic theories.

"Pure experience" taken in the epistemological sense seems to be reality which can be known, at that precise moment in time at which it is known. Referring to this sense of the term, James says: "The instant field of the present is at all times what I call 'pure' experience."41 He attempts to explain this

---

38 William Savery, "Concatenism," The Journal of Philosophy, XXXIV, No. 13, June 24, 1937. Mr. Savery, discussing the conflict between monism and pluralism, says: "At the beginning of the last decade of the nineteenth century the triumph of monism over pluralism seemed to be complete. Then came a turning point in philosophy. Charles Peirce proposed his synechism ... and ... William James developed this into his theory of concatenation."

39 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 23.

40 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 385.

41 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, 23.
very difficult concept in the following passage, where he says that a given portion of experience... taken in one context of associates, plays the part of a knower, of a state of mind, of 'consciousness'; while in a different context the same undivided bit of experience plays the part of a thing known, of an objective 'content.' In a word, in one group it figures as a thought, in another group as a thing. And, since it can figure in both groups simultaneously we have every right to speak of it as subjective and objective both at once.42

Part of the difficulty in this matter comes from the connotation of the term "experience." The word is commonly taken in the subjective sense, so much so that it is extremely difficult to conceive in the abstract, objective sense, apart from a person or a thing having the experience. It is doubtful whether James himself ever completely distinguished in his own mind the notions of "pure experience" and subjective experience, and the fact that he was continually accused of subjectivism and even of solipsism is proof enough that this theory was anything but clear to his readers. As a consequence he was forced to spend the major part of his time after the appearance of the articles propounding the theory of "pure experience" in defense of the theory itself. To cite only one example, Professor Warner Fite understood James to mean subjective experience, and James replied: "Pure experience for me antedates the distinction. It is my name for your ambiguous reality from which, wherever conceptually developed, the two

42 Ibid., 10.
sets of data come.\textsuperscript{43} Here we see James appealing to the metaphysical aspect of his theory for an explanation of the true nature of "pure experience." Such a re-assertion of its metaphysical nature clarifies the basic notion of "pure experience," but it hardly explains the difficult epistemological application.

In addition to the confusion arising from his terminology in the notion of "pure experience," James clouded the matter even more by continual lapses into the thought and expression of his former idealism. As late as 1905 we find him toying with the idea that perhaps his "pure experience" is, after all, in some sense subjective. He says, "Calling the stuff 'experience' implies that it should be either witnessed or witnessable. . ."\textsuperscript{44} This question involved the difficulty of explaining those experiences which were beyond the mental reach of man. They would, James thought, consist of further experiences; but whose? On this point Perry observes: "It would have been more consistent if James had rejected this as a false question. For if pure experience is prior to consciousness and self, then the personal pronoun is not applicable to it."\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{43} Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 391. Perry quotes a letter from James to Professor Fite.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., II, 756. The quotation is from the personal notes of James on the Miller-Bode controversy.

\textsuperscript{45} Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Briefer Version, 278.
Thus we have seen the development of the "stream of thought" from an analysis of the nature of the mind-process to an all-encompassing metaphysical setting for a new theory of knowledge. We have seen the effects, both good and bad, of James's eclectic education: his eminent readability, his richness of variety, his brilliant flashes of insight; and on the other hand, his occasionally confused thought, somewhat disorganized development, and frequently inaccurate presentation. These qualities have made him what he is, namely, the best known and most widely read American philosopher in the eyes of the public, and at the same time a problematic enigma in the eyes of serious scholars. James cannot be said to have founded any philosophic school in the strict sense; but on the other hand he has perhaps had, directly and indirectly, more influence on American thought of the past fifty years than any other single man. In his writings are found both the final expression of two centuries of associationism and the seeds of both behaviorism and functionalism; and James will remain, with all his defects and shortcomings, the father of that realism which is characteristic of American philosophy today.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. PRIMARY SOURCES


II. SECONDARY SOURCES

A. BOOKS


Knox, Howard V., The Philosophy of William James, New York, 1941.
Maire, Gilbert, William James, Paris, 1933.
Perry, Ralph Barton, Philosophy of the Recent Past, New York, 1926.
Perry, Ralph Barton, Present Philosophical Tendencies, New York, 1925.
Perry, Ralph Barton, In the Spirit of William James, New Haven, 1938.
Perry, Ralph Barton, The Thought and Character of William James, 2 vols., Boston, 1935.

--------------- In Commemoration of William James, Articles by Leading American Philosophers on the Centenary of the Death of James, New York, 1942.
B. ARTICLES

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mr. John Thomas Dulin, 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.

Oct. 17, 1955

Signature of Adviser