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Faith and Human Life According to William James

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FAITH AND HUMAN LIFE ACCORDING TO WILLIAM JAMES

by

Marilyn McCluskey

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CHAPTER I

THE PERSONAL CHARACTER OF THE PHILOSOPHY
OF WILLIAM JAMES

It has been said of contemporary existentialists that they philosophize from the viewpoint of one deeply involved in the action of life rather than from the viewpoint of a spectator. While historians do not usually number William James among the existentialists, there are striking similarities between his approach to philosophical questions and the decidedly personal philosophy for which certain existentialists, notably Kierkegaard and Marcel, are so well known. From their point of view, genuine philosophy can be done only by one who is intimately involved with the problems with which he concerns himself. These problems must be problems which arise out of the philosopher's own personal existence—problems which are of vital interest to him precisely because he is a human being. In general, existentialists have little use for the cold abstractions of logic. They are primarily interested in the problems of concrete human existence with all of its emotional and dramatic overtones.

Although William James was not an existentialist, his philosophy, like the philosophy of men like Kierkegaard and Marcel, was never a matter of abstract logical speculation;
for him it was always a living endeavor—a vocation. He knew well the belief of such philosophers as the rationalists and positivists of his day that philosophy, as well as all knowledge worthy of the name, must somehow be coldly objective. And he knew well that such a demand was unrealistic. For man is not pure intellect—he is flesh and blood, "a bundle of desires,"\(^1\) who lives inasmuch as they are gratified and dies to the extent that they are refused. According to James, it is this whole man, not just his intellect, that philosophizes. Certainly this was true in James's own case. Some might say that for James abstract rational objectivity was impossible because of his volatile, active, and emotional nature. Be that as it may, James did not philosophize from the viewpoint of one looking at the issues from the outside, nor did he think it wise that anyone should. He did not philosophize as one removed from the fray. Rather he philosophized from the middle of the battlefield, so to speak; and what he gave us was not an abstract analysis of reality, but a blow by blow account of life as concretely lived, a vivid description of the world as he experienced it. For James, the fullness of reality could never be held within the confines of any abstract generalizations or constructions.

For existential thinkers, the purpose of philosophy has always been to furnish a way of life rather than to develop

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The questions with which James concerned himself were common subjects of philosophical discussion in his day. They were problems which his father, Henry James, Sr., debated with his father's friends, and through his own extensive reading, William James was introduced to the course of the world determined by physical and chemical forces or by the world guided by some higher power possessing immortality. How can the presence of evil and of suffering be reconciled with the reality of an all-good God? Is the course of one's existence determined by blind physico-chemical forces or by a higher power? Is man free and responsible for his own life and for what becomes of the world? These concerns as well as many other...

...and many other...
Charles Peirce, Chauncey Wright, John Fiske, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. These men along with James and a few others formed a small group known as "The Metaphysical Club" which met regularly in Cambridge in the early 1870's for the express purpose of philosophical discussion.

Although the questions discussed by James with his friends and associates concerned problems which occupied many of the philosophic minds of the nineteenth century, for James they held a special fascination. They involved issues which were vitally important to him personally. He saw that the answers to these questions could influence his own way of life. More than that, the answers to these questions held the key to that most vital of all issues—the very value of life itself. Many and varied were the problems about which William James philosophized; and yet underlying all of them, even those which seemed the most metaphysical, was one burning issue—"Is life worth living?" And for James this was more than a merely academic question.

No doubt, there are men who have never asked themselves this question, because, de facto, life for them is generally pleasant; their days are relatively free of tragedy and pain; they are not reflective and perhaps are not often touched by, or vividly aware of, the pain of others. Ask them whether life is worth living or not, and they are likely to reply, "Of course it is," because they have never had any great reason to suspect that it might not be. There are still other men, perhaps like Henry James, Sr., for whom life,
with whatever pains and sorrows and tragedies it may embody, is worth living in virtue of some ultimate outcome of it, such as promised happiness in heaven or the oneness with God that the faith of Henry James, Sr., promised him. But for all those for whom the question does not pose a problem—either because they do not have a faith which guarantees them a happy ending, no matter what, or because even though they anticipate or at least hope for some repose or joy when life is over, they need something now to make them want to live now. The hope of heavenly bliss may make dying somewhat easier, but it does not in every case provide a compelling motive for living. It is not always enough to keep the fire of life burning from day to day.

The youthful William James did not share his father's Swedenborgian faith in the eventual mergence of man's selfhood in the selfhood of God. Even if he had had no intellectual difficulties with his father's theology, his own longing for self-identity and self-realization would have made any theory which even suggested the loss of the individual creature's identity in that of the Creator repugnant to him. As far as any individual personal survival after death is concerned, William James in his youth did not seem to have any convictions in that regard, although in later life he confessed a growing need for such a belief. But even if he had believed in some sort of eternal reward or life after death, it is not likely that this belief in some future happiness would in itself have been enough to give him any zest for living, for
the intervening time would still be devoid of meaning.

For James, living to the full meant using all of his powers; it meant being productive and creative; it meant alleviating as much of the pain and evil in the world as possible; it meant contributing in some way to the beauty and goodness of the universe. For James, to live with zest and gusto was to live the moral life to the full, i.e., to live a life of responsible human action by which one resists evil and seeks good, not merely one's own private good but the good of one's neighbors, the community, and the world as a whole. James felt that in order for life to be worth living, reality must somehow be commensurate with and congenial to man's most intimate and cherished powers. His desires, motives, and abilities must have some real relevance to the universe as a whole. Man longs to make some lasting, significant, and uniquely personal contribution to the world's goodness and beauty; and he wants to know that, even if he himself should not survive, the ideals which he admired, loved, and helped to actualize by his efforts will in some way last forever. Thus the only life worth living for James was the moral life authenticated and sanctioned by an eternal moral order. The only life worth living was an active moral life in a universe in which one's striving, however feeble, could never completely come to naught.

To meet the challenges of the world with spirit and determination, to fight for the good and to overcome evil, meant living to the full. But as early as 1861, poor health
began to weaken the vigor of James's own activities. He became afflicted with eye trouble, digestive problems, back pains, and numerous attacks of neurasthenia, all of which hampered his physical activities as well as his intellectual pursuits for many years. A certain mental depression frequently accompanied the physical ailments. It is not possible to say whether the physical ailments caused the mental depression or the mental condition caused the physical difficulties; but in all probability, no matter what the basic causes of either, it seems safe to say that they augmented each other. Certainly James's sense of inactivity and unproductiveness as well as the difficulty he experienced in making decisions must have contributed to a feeling of futility which could make any man wonder whether life was worth living or not. That he thought of suicide is admitted in his diary as well as mentioned in his correspondence with his friend, Tom Ward; apparently it was not always clearly evident to the young William James that life was worth living.

To what extent his disillusionment with life was brought about by his own ill health and the sufferings of his brother Henry and his sister Alice (which he witnessed with great anguish on his part) is difficult to say. But it is apparent that James's early philosophical reflections had much to do with his disenchantment with living. There was in fact a kind of reciprocal relation between his ill health and his philosophizing; for while it is true that his early reflections upon life contributed to his mental depression, it is
also true that his illnesses in turn spurred James on to still deeper philosophical thought. His illnesses not only provided the leisure necessary for speculation by putting a damper upon his more active life; but Ralph Barton Perry suggests that James's melancholia and neurasthenia to a great extent required a philosophical cure inasmuch as they were due at least in part to his lack of a philosophy by which to live. In Perry's view, James's survival depended upon his finding answers to the basic questions of life, particularly to the question of man's real relationship to the universe as a whole. ²

James's early philosophical outlook and, one might add, his permanent philosophical outlook were greatly colored by his concern with the particulars of experience. He was strongly attracted by the philosophy of empiricism; and such an attraction was quite natural, given his scientific background. Certainly his training in biology, as well as in the other sciences with their emphasis upon observation and experiment, contributed much to his conviction that the sole reliable source of knowledge is the experience of particulars. Of course, James was influenced also by his reading of the early British empiricists, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Mill, as well as by his association with "The Metaphysical Club," particularly with such devotees of exact science as Chauncey

Wright and Charles Peirce. But the influence of these men might not have been so strong had James not encountered them already predisposed by his own scientific background to look favorably upon experience as the fount of all knowledge.

The empirical philosophy with which the young William James was familiar, however, seemed to be tending more and more toward sensationalism, materialism, and determinism; and although his religious heritage and moralistic tendencies prevented James from ever accepting such theories wholeheartedly, he nevertheless was vulnerable to their influence and at times momentarily fell under their sway. In 1867 he wrote to his father from Berlin: "I feel myself ... more and more drifting towards the sensationalism closed in by scepticism ... ." To Tom Ward he wrote from Cambridge in 1869:

I'm swamped in an empirical philosophy—I feel that we are nature through and through, that we are wholly conditioned, that not a wiggle of our will happens save as the result of physical laws, and yet notwithstanding, we are en rapport with reason. How to conceive it? Who knows?"

These lines reveal the dilemma faced by William James and other young thinkers of his time. On the one hand, the industrialization which scientific discovery and human invention made possible after the Civil War seemed to testify to the fact that the individual person had a free and actively creative role to play in the progress of society. On the
other hand, there were philosophers and scientists who seemed to be robbing man of his unique place in nature by interpreting both man and nature mechanistically—thus reducing man to a mere cog in a machine and making freedom nothing but an illusion. The horns of the dilemma faced by James were spiritualism (theism) and freedom on the one hand and materialism and determinism on the other.

All the evidence in favor of man's free creative role in the universe notwithstanding, James was pulled by his scientific tendencies and empiricist outlook toward the view that all that happens in the universe is rigidly determined by blind forces of nature and that the course of human life and the course of the world as a whole can be reduced to a process of mechanical evolution. Such a materialistic interpretation of life, however, meant the complete frustration of James's moral aspirations; for according to the theory of mechanical evolution, whatever good and beautiful things have thus far evolved, whether the work of man or not, must one day be destroyed. As the result of the continual redistribution of matter and energy, evolution must inevitably be followed by dissolution. As A. J. Balfour put it,

The energies of our system will decay. . . . 'Imperishable monuments' and 'immortal deeds,' death itself, and love stronger than death, will be as if they had not been. Nor will anything that is, be better or worse for all that the labor, genius, devotion, and suffering of man have striven through countless ages to effect.  

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5William James, Pragmatism and Four Essays from The Meaning of Truth, Meridian Books (Cleveland and New York:
Viewing the future of the world from a materialistic point of view could only lead to despair, for materialism meant that all man's cherished aspirations and all of his expansive emotions such as admiration and love, hope, fortitude, and joy had no real objects—for in reality, all the ideas loved, desired, hoped for, and fought for would one day be reduced to nothing. As James himself said,

That is the sting of it, that in the vast driftings of the cosmic weather, though many a jewelled shore appears, and many an enchanted cloud-bank floats away, long lingering ere it be dissolved—even as our world now lingers, for our joy—yet when these transient products are gone, nothing, absolutely nothing, remains, to represent those particular qualities, those elements of preciousness which they may have enshrined. Dead and gone are they, gone utterly from the very sphere and room of being. Without an echo; without a memory; without an influence on aught that may come after, to make it care for similar ideals. This utter final wreck and tragedy is of the essence of scientific materialism as at present understood. The lower and not the higher forces are the eternal forces, or the last surviving forces within the only cycle of evolution which we can definitely see. 6

Thus materialism's final word was that all striving is in vain. Insofar as it made the lower and blind forces in the world control the world's destiny and insofar as it posited the eventual annihilation of all human values, the materialism of James's time rendered man's role in the universe meaningless and insignificant. Such a philosophy which legitimized only the emotions of fear and despair left man with little for which to care and nothing for which to live. It certainly

6Ibid.

rendered impossible what James himself considered the only life worth living—a moral life warranted by an "eternal moral order." "This need of an eternal moral order," James wrote, "is one of the deepest needs of our breast." Man needs to feel that his active striving is never totally fruitless. He needs to feel that the ideals of goodness and beauty for which he lives and works will survive even if he should perish, that these ideals will not decay along with the material universe.

Despite materialism's bleak outlook, however, James found its stress upon the developmental aspects of reality congenial to his way of thinking and in harmony with his experience. Thus he found it difficult to reject materialism completely. But although he could not at the time reject it entirely, his attitude toward it was largely negative, as the following lines from a memorandum sent to Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., in the winter of either 1866 or 1867 reveal.

But as a man's happiness depends on his feeling, I think materialism inconsistent with a high degree thereof, and in this sense [I] maintained that a materialist should not be an optimist, using the latter word to signify one whose philosophy authenticates, by guaranteeing the objective significance of, his most pleasurable feelings.8

Although James at this period in his life seemed intellectually compelled to examine deterministic naturalism, the kind of world he really needed and wanted was a world in

7Ibid., p. 77.

which mind, rather than the blind forces of nature, was in control—a spiritual or theistic world, in other words—a world in which some higher spiritual power, which one might call God if he wished, guaranteed an ideal order that would be permanently preserved. James needed a world in which his cherished ideals would be looked after and cared for even if he failed to bring them to fruition. A letter to Tom Ward in 1868 expressed the religious desire which James felt that he shared with most men. "We long for sympathy, for a purely personal communication, first with the soul of the world, and then with the soul of our fellows. And happy are they who think, or know, that they have got them!"  

James's father was one of those who thought he enjoyed such communication—but youthful William James was not. He was continually tossed about on the waves of doubt; he wanted to believe, but intellectual difficulties made him uncertain. Thus unable to find meaning for his existence in religious belief, young William James tenaciously clung to the moral life. He saw the moral life as the only response to the universe which could make life at all worth living in a materialistic scheme of things. For even if there were no God to guarantee an eternal moral order in which his ideals would be preserved, even if someday all of his efforts would count as nothing, still he could find some satisfaction in life by helping his contemporaries to suffer less and enjoy more, and perhaps he

9The Letters of William James, I, 131.
could even contribute in some way to the well-being of whatever
generations were still to come.

James's experience, from one point of view at least,
seemed to lend support to the view that a man by his actions
could contribute something to the good in the world and help
ease the suffering therein. For his experience revealed beyond
any doubt that men did indeed suffer and enjoy, and that indi-
viduals by their actions could alleviate some of that suffer-
ing and add to that enjoyment. Even though his philosophical
outlook at that time might prevent him from believing in a
God who cared for him and for his ideals, James felt that he
could still find reason for living and some value in his own
existence by helping others. James wrote to Tom Ward:

All I can tell you is the thought that with me outlasts
all others, and onto which, like a rock, I find myself
washed up when the waves of doubt are weltering over
all the rest of the world; and that is the thought of
my having a will, and of my belonging to a brotherhood
of men possessed of a capacity for pleasure and pain of
different kinds. For even at one's lowest ebb of be-
lief, the fact remains empirically certain (and by our
will we can, if not absolutely refrain from looking
beyond that empirical fact, at least practically and
on the whole accept it and let it suffice us)—that
men suffer and enjoy. And if we have to give up all
hope of seeing into the purposes of God, or to give
up theoretically the idea of final causes, and of God
anyhow as vain and leading to nothing for us, we can,
by our will, make the enjoyment of our brothers stand
us in the stead of a final cause; and through a know-
ledge of the fact that that enjoyment on the whole
depends on what individuals accomplish, lead a life so
active, and so sustained by a clean conscience as not
to fret much.10

But even this moral life preserver in a sea of doubt had a

10 Ibid., p. 130.
way of slipping from James's grasp--for empiricism as he was familiar with it seemed to imply determinism. At least the empiricism of Bain and Mill, who were much discussed by James and the other members of "The Metaphysical Club," was decidedly deterministic. Determinism, however, took all the zest out of the moral life. What merit or value could human actions have (however salutary they might be) if they could not have been otherwise? What could James personally and creatively contribute to the world for better or worse if he were but a cog in the vast machine of the universe--if all he did were rigidly determined? Determinism not only took the satisfaction out of the moral life, it rendered the moral life non-moral--for moral action is moral action only to the extent that it is free and responsible. And so the young William James floated back and forth between lights and shadows, grasping at rays of hope only to find them vanish again and again in the dark fog of nihilism.

It is not difficult to see how William James's philosophical turmoil, combined with physical and mental ills, could have led him to the brink of despair. For if all the world's affairs are rigidly governed by blind physio-chemical forces, then all physical ailments as well as all mental difficulties must be rigidly determined or the result of chance; and all efforts to overcome them must be useless. Indeed, there were times when James felt that nature and life had simply 'unfitted' him for all the activities to which he aspired. The result was apathy and a kind of paralysis of the will. But
James's despair was never final. He could never unreservedly resign himself to the life of inactivity and waste to which his illness and philosophic determinism seemed to relegate him. He could never unreservedly accept materialism and its deterministic implications. He could never wholeheartedly accept a philosophy which took all the joy out of living by rendering human action ineffective and meaningless. James's inward rebellion against determinism and the inexorability of evil, suggested by the unrelenting character of his own illness, found articulate expression in some notes written during the summer of 1869. Although he did not seem to espouse a doctrine of freedom definitively until almost a year later, these notes indicate that he was inclined to believe that man does have some freedom of choice. He suggested, for example, that to accept the universe or to protest against it are two voluntary alternatives.

So that in a given case of evil the mind seesaws between the effort to improve it away, and resignation. The second not being resorted to till the first has failed, it would seem either that the second were an insincere pis aller, or the first a superfluous vanity. The solution can only lie in taking neither absolutely, but in making the resignation only provisional (that is, voluntary, conditional), and the attempt to improve to have its worth in the action rather than the result. Thus resignation affords grounds and leisure to advance to new philanthropic action. Resignation should not say, "it is good," "a mild yoke," and so forth, but "I'm willing to stand it for the present."11

Apparent in this passage is James's conviction that what is important is the fight, even if the battle be lost—that it is

11 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, I, 301.
a man's moral fibre that counts even if his efforts come to naught. One also sees James's refusal to close his eyes to evil, to consider evil in some way good, or to consider it as irremediable. For James, evil was a part of his experience; his own life would not allow him to blink it away. He could not go along with the idealism of Francis H. Bradley. For Bradley evil was not fully real; it was only an appearance—simply one aspect of the Absolute which in itself was perfect in every respect.  

Nor could James go along with those who absolved man from all responsibility toward evil, either by denying man's freedom or by placing the responsibility ultimately upon God as William's father was wont to do. For Henry James, Sr., man really does nothing; God does all; all men are merely manifestations of God who has alienated himself from himself for the purpose of an eventual free and loving reunion. According to Henry, Sr., all the vicissitudes of the

12"Evil and good are not illusions, but they are most certainly appearances. They are one-sided aspects, each overruled and transmuted in the Whole. . . . As with truth and error, so with good and bad, the opposition is not absolute. For, to some extent and in some manner, perfection is everywhere realized. And yet, upon the other hand, the distinction of degrees is no less vital. The interval which exists between, and which separates, the lower and the higher, is measured by the idea of perfect Reality. The lower is that which, to be made complete, would have to undergo a more total transformation of its nature. And viewed from the ground of what is higher—of what they fail to reach or even oppose—the lower truth and lower goodness become sheer error and evil. The Absolute is perfect in all its detail, it is equally true and good throughout. But, upon the other side, each distinction of better and more true, every degree and each comparative stage of reality is essential." (F. H. Bradley, Appearance and Reality [London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Lim.; New York: Macmillan Company, 1899], p. 401.)
spiritual life, its ups and downs, its triumphs and its falls, are all God's work and man is deserving of neither praise nor blame. God, He said, will eventually bring good out of all—the ultimate good being the final reunion of God with Himself in the eventual mergence of all individual human selves with the divine Selfhood.

William was not at all in sympathy with his father's view of evil. He was sympathetic, however, with the views of his father's friend and opponent, Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle was militant in his attitude toward evil; he recognized it as real and set the moral will against it. Henry, Sr., however, saw the struggle between good and evil as somehow transcended in the movement of the Divine Spirit toward ultimate reunion with itself. For Carlyle, on the other hand, the conflict between good and evil was absolutely valid in itself, and so it was for William James also. For William James, good and evil were both real in experience and could not be identified or subsumed into one. Furthermore, righteousness demanded that man love the good and hate the evil. And to hate evil meant not merely to brood over it, to grieve over it; it meant actively to combat it—to attack and effectually overcome it within the world of action.

According to William James, man must fight evil as best he can and contribute as much good to the world as possible. This was the moral life to which he aspired, the life for which he longed with all of his heart; but his empiricist philosophy with its apparent deterministic implications and his own
physical weaknesses had seemed to put thumbs down on it. However, by the end of 1869, James was beginning to overcome the psychological inhibitions which prevented him from actively espousing the moral life although his physical difficulties still tended to paralyze him. Whatever else he could not do, he could still make decisions that affected life and appreciate life as he saw others live it. "I may not study, make, or enjoy—but I can will. I can find some real life in the mere respect for other forms of life as they pass, even if I can never embrace them as a whole or incorporate them with myself." On February 1, 1870, William James decided to give the moral life a try for its own sake.

Today, I about touched bottom, and perceive plainly that I must face the choice with open eyes: shall I frankly throw the moral business overboard, as one unsuited to my innate aptitudes, or shall I follow it, and it alone, making everything else merely stuff for it? I will give the latter alternative a fair trial.

The problem of intellectual unification still remained, however. How could the possibility of moral action be reconciled with the determinism which empiricism seemed to entail? It was the French philosopher, Charles Renouvier, who finally helped James to recognize that determinism is not a necessary implication of empiricism at all. Renouvier believed that the only philosophical doctrine that could be the logical enemy of

13 William James, "Diary," quoted in Allen, William James, p. 163.

freedom is the pantheistic doctrine of substance—the doctrine that men and all other phenomena are but manifestations of the one absolute substance from which all phenomenal appearances flow necessarily. But there is nothing in empiricist philosophy as such that logically demands determinism. In fact, from the point of view of Renouvier and finally from that of James himself, empirically one can not prove that either determinism or freedom characterizes human activity.

But in that case, how does one settle the issue? What does one do—suspend judgment? To suspend judgment implies that a judgment is equally possible; it implies a choice; it implies freedom. Doubting is itself an option—a state of voluntary inhibition and suspense. According to Renouvier, the possibility of doubting our freedom, of doubting anything, implies the possibility of affirming it; but that means that one has a choice. Since determinism and freedom are alike indemonstrable, whichever one a person accepts, he accepts, not because his intellect is coerced by any incontrovertible evidence but simply because he chooses to accept it—he accepts it on faith—he freely believes in it. And so Renouvier wrote—"Let our liberty pronounce on its own real existence." 15 The impact of Renouvier's reflections on William James was decidedly salutary. In one of James's notebooks, we find the following entry, dated April 30, 1870:

I think that yesterday was a crisis in my life. I finished the first part of Renouvier's second "Essais" and see no reason why his definition of Free Will—"the sustaining of a thought because I choose to when I might have other thoughts"—need be the definition of an illusion. At any rate, I will assume for the present—until next year—that it is no illusion. My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will. For the remainder of the year, I will abstain from the mere speculation and contemplative Grüblei in which my nature takes most delight, and voluntarily cultivate the feeling of moral freedom, by reading books favorable to it, as well as by acting. . . . Hitherto, when I have felt like taking a free initiative, like daring to act originally, without carefully waiting for contemplation of the external world to determine all for me, suicide seemed the most manly form to put my daring into; now, I will go a step further with my will, not only act with it, but believe as well; believe in my individual reality and creative power. My belief, to be sure, can't be optimistic—but I will posit life (the real, the good) in the self-governing resistance of the ego to the world. Life shall [be built in] doing and suffering and creating.16

James's acceptance of the fact that the will is free, that the mind can act without being determined in its activity by physical or psychic coercion, and his determination to cultivate the belief in his own freedom by voluntarily exercising it was clearly a turning point in his life. His posture at this time was the beginning of his physical and mental recovery. His decision freely to accept freedom and to affirm actively as well as theoretically that life—the good life—the life worth living—consists in resisting evil, struggling for the good, in "doing and suffering and creating," had more than a therapeutic value, however. Together with the empiricist insight, which James never lost, this concrete espousal of the

16 James, "Diary," The Writings of William James, pp. 7-8.
moral life as the life worth living functioned as a fundamental principle by which he not only directed his entire life but navigated his philosophical vessel as well. (He was not prepared to distinguish between how he lived his life and how he operated philosophically, for in him the two in fact formed a single unity.) James lived the moral life first of all, and finding it eminently livable, adopted moralism not only as a philosophical position but as a kind of standard to which any philosophical view had to measure up if it was to win his support. No theory which would render the moral life impossible could hope for a favorable reception. This does not mean that James would dispute some one else's right to believe it, if he chose to do so; it simply means that James himself would be unable to espouse it, because it ran counter to the evidence in his experience.

From his acquaintance with the thought of Renouvier, not only did James come to realize that he had the right to believe in his own freedom, but he also began to see that he might have the right to believe other things which while not logically or philosophically demonstrable were nevertheless necessary for effective moral action. Renouvier confirmed in James's mind something which James himself had much earlier felt but which his rigorous scientific training had no doubt prevented him from espousing—namely the fact that heart and head work together in determining convictions. As Renouvier pointed out, when a judgment is necessary for action and when experience and reason can not determine one's judgment, then it is
the will's place to do so and faith must come into play. In this doctrine of Renouvier, James found the confirmation of his own insight—an insight which was to play a central role in the development of his entire philosophy and from which he was to develop the pragmatic method for which he became famous.

In enumerating the factors which may have influenced a given man's philosophy, it is not uncommon to include his family background, the social and cultural milieu in which he lived, and his formal education, including the earlier philosophers with whose works he was familiar as well as those contemporary thinkers with whom he may have had direct or indirect contact. Certainly in the case of William James, all of these can be said to have helped to shape his thought in one way or another. But it is obvious that the one overwhelming influence, which functioned not only as the primary source of his own doctrines but also as the test of the opinions offered to him by other thinkers, past and present, was his own lived experience in which all of these elements found a place.

The greatest single factor which shaped James's philosophy and which in a sense determined the effects which all other influences were to have on it was James's own life and his living of it.

Ralph Barton Perry speaks of Renouvier as "the greatest individual influence upon the development of James's thought"; and James, himself, acknowledges his great indebtedness to

17 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, I, 655.
Renouvier in the dedication of *Some Problems of Philosophy*. Nevertheless, Renouvier's contribution to James was not that of revealing to him facts otherwise unknown; rather his acquaintance with Renouvier's writings helped James to realize fully the truth of what he had already suspected. The influence of Renouvier, of course, must not be discounted; but it must be said that it was James's own life which contributed the most to, and provided the ultimate warrant for, the philosophy which James was to develop—a philosophy, which unlike the rationalistic and positivistic schools of thought enjoying popularity in his day, provided a legitimate and necessary place for faith in the lives of men.

The purpose of this thesis will be to examine in depth the position of William James in regard to faith. Consideration will be given to what faith in general is, its legitimate place in human life, indeed its necessity for both thought and human action. Special attention will be paid to religious faith in particular, especially to James's justification of religious belief as a necessity not only for the fulfillment of man but also for the fulfillment of the universe as a whole.

Much has been done on the question of faith since the death of William James. In this thesis, however, no attempt will be made to evaluate James in terms of the work of later writers or to reconcile his position with current trends on the subject. Since the purpose of this thesis is primarily exposition, the reader will find a minimum of critical assessment. There is a sense in which James's philosophy is presently
being rediscovered, and when a man's thought is thus being reexamined, the first task to be accomplished is that of exposition and unification.
In reflecting upon life as he lived it, William James shared reverence for experienced fact with the empiricists and respect for reason and logic with the rationalists; but he refused to allow sense and reason exclusive access to reality or an exclusive franchise on truth. The world, as James experienced it, was a world in which faith was not only an empirical datum, in the sense that men did in fact believe when conclusive evidence was lacking, but also a necessary factor in the world's development, as well as the key without which many of its doors would never be unlocked and many of its secrets never discovered.

Having found faith to be a practical necessity for his own life, James was forced by his understanding of experience to take account of faith in his philosophy. The quality of his experience demanded the recognition of faith as an indispensable factor in the evolution of reality as well as a necessary avenue to truth. Our purpose in this chapter will be to examine some of the more salient features of James's philosophy in order to discover what there was about experience, as James interpreted it, that made him assign to faith such a significant role.
William James's metaphysics can be appropriately described as a biographical metaphysics. Indeed the influence of his life upon his thought was so great that his metaphysics became almost a mirror of his lived experience. As an examination of his philosophy reveals, his life and his metaphysics to a great extent paralleled each other, the latter involving the conceptualization of the felt experiences of the former. That his life and his metaphysics went hand in hand was as it should be from James's own point of view, for in his opinion the only raw material out of which a man can legitimately build a metaphysics is his own experience. Describing a man's philosophy as the way in which he feels the "whole push" of the universe and experiences "the whole drift of life," James suggested that philosophy is little more than the biographies of philosophers.

Although one might be tempted to expect that basic similarities in men's lives would result in philosophies that would be the same in broadest outlines, such is not the case. There are two reasons for this: first, no two men share precisely the same experiences, however similar their lives may be; and secondly, most men conceive the world after the analogy of some one particular experienced feature of it which especially interests them or with which they feel most comfortable. Thus, among professional philosophers, we have materialists on the one hand and spiritualists on the other; pluralists and monists;

empiricists and rationalists; indeterminists and determinists; and so forth. A man's philosophy, whether it be the professional philosopher's view of reality or the ordinary man's sense of the meaning of life, mirrors his experience in some way. However, it very often reflects only one preferred part of that experience—one or more aspects of it standing out clearly in the foreground, others being blurred or even lost entirely in the background.

For James, himself, however, all of life was fascinating. He did not, as so many other thinkers did, single out one special facet of the experienced world and make it the model for his philosophical picture. All of the details of experience were interesting, valuable, and worthy of note from James's point of view; and in his metaphysics, he tried to take every one of them into account in some way.

James, himself, described his own philosophy as a radical empiricism—an empiricism because experience and only experience

2James described radical empiricism in terms of a postulate, a statement of fact, and a generalized conclusion. The postulate was that the only things about which philosophers can lawfully argue are things that can be described in terms of experience. James was careful to point out that this did not mean that other things can not exist, but that it did mean that other things are not the proper subjects for philosophical debate. The statement of fact affirmed that the relations among things, relations which are conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are experienced just as directly as the things themselves are. And the generalized conclusion was that the universe as directly experienced has a concatenated continuous structure of its own inasmuch as the connective relations among the things experienced are themselves matters of direct apprehension, and that, therefore, it is unnecessary to postulate any sort of trans-empirical support to hold the various parts of the world together—they hold together by themselves.
ence provided the raw material for it, radical because not only did he refrain from introducing elements that could not be described in empirical terms but furthermore he refused to exclude anything that was directly experienced. His fondness for particular facts and details and the very movement of life itself made the abstract and static systems of the rationalistic philosophers seem like empty shadows in comparison with the concrete flux of life; and thus James would allow nothing of his experience to be lost sight of in his metaphysics. As we shall discover in the following paragraphs, James's meta-

3The primacy of experience in James's philosophy has prompted several contemporary writers to try to place James within the tradition of phenomenology. Although James himself did not describe his own work in phenomenological terms, philosophers such as Aron Gurwitsch, John Wild, and Johannes Lin- schoten have found significant parallels between the thought of William James and that of contemporary phenomenology. According to James M. Edie, "Some of these can be traced to the direct influence of James on Husserl, but for the most part they transcend such direct historical interaction and rather show a common spirit and temper, developing independently but convergently toward the same goal--namely, the establishment of the bases for a method of radical empiricism in philosophy." (James M. Edie, "Necessary Truth and Perception: William James on the Structure of Experience," in New Essays in Phenomenology, ed. by James M. Edie [Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969], p. 233.)

4James considered himself an opponent of rationalism. But his opposition to it did not imply that he had no use for reason and logic. On the contrary, as we already indicated, he had a healthy respect for both of them and often pointed out that conceptual knowledge and logical rules have an important function in life insofar as they help a man to get around among the parts of his experience. However, James felt that concepts can never exhaust reality or adequately represent it, for there is a dynamism about reality that the static unchanging concepts of the mind can never capture. There is something about the flux of experience that seems to escape forever the grip of logic. Reality and life are wider than logic; they spill over the limits of all of our conceptual schemes. And the concepts that we do find useful, James said, are useful only insofar as they lead us back to the world of experience again.
physics, perhaps more than that of any other man, can be said to mirror his life and fittingly be called a biographical metaphysics.

According to James's biographers, from earliest childhood, his experience was of variety, novelty, movement, and activity of many kinds. As a child he lived in almost ceaseless environmental change. Because of his father's inability to decide, with any degree of resoluteness, on the best mode of educating his children, William James studied in schools in England, France, Switzerland, Germany, and more than one city in the United States. From his birth in 1842 until he received his degree in medicine from Harvard in 1869, he made four trips to Europe and one to Brazil and studied a variety of subjects including languages, classical and modern literature, art, science, psychology, medicine, and philosophy. And even after his professional life began, he lived his life against a continually fluctuating background provided by Europe and the United States. His purposes in traveling included improving his health, studying, delivering lectures, supporting peace movements, promoting mental health, and observing the progress of physical research. James's activities were as varied as his surroundings.

Wherever James was, he was extremely sensitive to the richness of his environment, to the wealth of detail which made each place unlike any other, and to the novelty of each new situation. No matter how many times he visited a place, he could always see something in it that he had not seen before; he always had something new to report to his family and friends.
as his letters to them reveal. But as his letters also show, very often the impression made upon him by a country or a city was due not so much to the physical surroundings as to the personal characteristics of its inhabitants. Although nature in its varying costumes always intrigued James, it was people with their unique points of view, their faiths (religious and otherwise), their virtues, their foibles, and their general unpredictableness that captivated him most of all. They, after all, made the world what it was—good or bad, better or worse. And James was one of them—acutely aware that by whatever he did he added something to the goodness or badness of the situation and that his ability to act fruitfully at all demanded faith on his part—faith in himself, in other men, and in God.

The world, as James lived in it, then, was a multi-faceted world—dynamic and always changing, lacking any rigidly determined order, permeated with the novel and the unexpected, bearing the impress of personality (human and divine), and of course moralistic. It is not surprising that the world presumed in his philosophy should be the same. Indeed, like the world of his lived experience, the world given to us in James's metaphysics is pluralistic, evolving (although not according to any rigidly determined plan), tychistic, personal, and moral. And just as the well-being and productiveness of James himself required the exercise of faith on his part, so too the progress, development, and perfection of this pluralistic and open-ended universe as a whole demand faith on the part of men.
James did not make a place for faith in his philosophy simply because he personally felt the need for it in his own life. On the contrary, he did so because the very character of the universe demanded it. A closer examination of his metaphysics will make this clear.

The universe for James was obviously pluralistic. It was, in some sense, a collection of many things some of which at least were only externally related to each other. The diversity of James's own experience made it impossible for him to agree with the rationalistic philosophers whose passion for simplicity, unity, and economy of thought led them to underplay the multiplicity in reality and to try to explain the universe in terms of as few principles as possible—ideally in terms of one principle if that could be accomplished. James's experience revealed to him a world more like the world of the eighteenth century British empiricists, a world of multiple data, a changing world of particular facts. On the other hand, James did not agree with those empiricists who saw reality merely as the sum of entirely separate phenomena or representations; he disagreed with Hume, for example, who claimed that all perceptions are loose, separate and disconnected. The various aspects of James's experience flowed one into the other and while many items of it were indeed separated from others by intervening items, nevertheless, his experience as a whole had a directly perceived continuity as well as unity.

According to James, Hume and empiricists like him failed to see most of the conjunctive relations among things—
connective relations by which one thing can be said to be with another thing, near another thing, like another, caused by another, intended by another, or belonging to another. Such connections James found to be directly apprehended in experience. Thinkers like Hume, however, readily recognized the relations of disjunction among phenomena but rarely saw the connections and continuity among them. In James's experience, on the other hand, the conjunctive relations were grasped as clearly as the disjunctions and were therefore just as fully real.

While James could not accept the totally fragmented world of ordinary empiricism, he likewise found untenable the kind of unity which the rationalists presumed to be sustaining all reality. The modern rationalists, disturbed by the splintered universe that they believed resulted from the empiricism of men like Hume, tried to remedy the situation by positing some kind of trans-empirical agents of unification such as substances or souls. The most complete unification was achieved by philosophers such as Hegel, Royce, and Bradley, who posited an Absolute and who, each in his own way, made the multiple phenomena of experience to be parts of this Absolute, manifestations of it, or objects of its thought. However their views may have differed, Hegel, Royce, and Bradley posited the Absolute as the only authentic reality, in relation to which the phenomena of finite human experience were but transitory or even illusory appearances. Where Hume's empiricism had left diversity, their rationalistic monism provided unity; it made unity the essential characteristic of reality and made multiplicity and
diversity mere semblances of the real. James, however, could not reconcile either ordinary empiricism or rationalism with his own experience, for James's experience revealed neither absolute unity nor absolute diversity. No item in James's experience ever exactly duplicated another; thus there was always lacking the unity of exact similarity. Furthermore, while some items may have been with each other or near each other in terms of space and time and thus spatially and temporally connected, other items were separated from each other by space and time and were thus disjunctively related. Moreover, while James experienced some things as causally related, he experienced many other things which did not appear to influence each other actively at all. Multiplicity and diversity were thus obvious features of James's experience; but the multiplicity and diversity notwithstanding, each part of James's lived experience was continuous with the part which preceded it and with the part which followed it. Thus his experience as a whole revealed that reality had some kind of unity, not, however, the kind of unity posited by absolute monism in which all the parts somehow interpenetrated and were in some way one with the whole and with each other. Rather, as the world appeared to James, it had a 'strung-along' type of unity. While its parts were distinct from each other, they were nevertheless joined together, figuratively speaking, by their edges. The parts of James's world were not only next to each other, they ran into each other without interruption. They were continuous. Of course, each and every part of the world was not
experienced by James as continuous with each and every other part, but every item in his experience was next to, or continuous with, some other items. And these in turn were continuous with still others so that in one way or another, every thing in the world of James's experience was linked, directly or indirectly, with every other thing. Because of this empirically evident unity, James believed that the world held together by itself and did not require any trans-empirical Absolute to keep it from falling apart.

James rejected the monistic theory of the Absolute not only because it was unnecessary and not corroborated by his experience but also because the data provided by his experience actually supported pluralism not monism. The evidence found within James's own life ran counter to monism's denial of plurality and diversity, its denial of change, novelty and development, and its denial of evil. To William James it was empirically evident that reality was multiple and diverse and constantly changing, that it was a mixture of good and evil (the proportions of which did not remain the same), and that development was continually occurring. While the rationalists held that everything flowed so necessarily from the Absolute that, if one could see things from its point of view, every future event could be accurately predicted, James saw the world as tychistic, as involving spontaneity and novelty. Chance events in the sense of the unpredictable and the unexpected were common occurrences in his own life; no moment of his experience ever seemed to duplicate another. Thus, unlike
the finished and completed world of the rationalists, James's world appeared to grow continually by the successive additions of novel experiences—experiences that grew out of but never repeated the old. And the future of his world, like the future of James himself, could not be precisely foreseen.

James's rejection of rationalistic monism and his adoption of pluralism were, as we have noted, based upon the evidence of his experience; but one can hardly doubt that his acceptance of the one and rejection of the other also received a certain sanction from the moralistic posture of his life. For the moral life could have no place in a monistic universe. Moral commitment, i.e., free commitment, would be impossible in a fatalistic world in which all that happened was necessary; more than that, human activity would be somehow less than real in a scheme in which the only fully real thing was thought to be eternal and unchanging; and whether real or not, human activity would be, to some degree, like beating the air if the world were essentially finished and complete and if man's actions could not significantly change or improve it in any way. Furthermore, if all were necessary, experienced evil, illusory or otherwise, could not be alleviated. In a word, a monistic world simply held no challenge for the powers of a man for whom a life of creative, productive, moral action was a cherished dream.

The world, for James, was thus a plurality—not in the sense that it had no unity at all, but in the sense that many of its parts were only externally related to one another.
some things, of course, may have been internally related, i.e. related because of what they were, related by their very existence. For example, William James and his friend, Tom Ward, could be said to be internally related because they were both men. "When two terms are similar, their very natures enter into the relation. Being what they are, no matter where or when, the likeness never can be denied." However, many things in the world of James's experience were related not because of what they were but only because of where they happened to be or when they happened to be. For example, two diverse events happening at the same time but in different places may have been related only by the fact of simultaneity. A hat and a pencil lying on a table may have been related only insofar as they happened to be together in the same place.

Other relations, the where and the when, for example, seem adventitious. The sheet of paper may be 'off' or 'on' the table, for example; and in either case the relation involves only the outside of its terms. Having an outside, both of them, they contribute by it to the relation. It is external: the term's inner nature is irrelevant to it.

Thus, for James, the world was not a universe nor a multiverse purely and simply. The world was one just insofar as he experienced it as concatenated and continuous; it was not one just to the extent that disconnections and disjunctions were directly felt. The pluralism which James saw in the universe meant that everything had an external environment of some kind.

6Ibid., p. 110.
and no reality could be said to encompass all others as the rationalistic Absolute was thought to do.

However, to describe the world as a plurality is, from one point of view at least, to characterize it negatively. It is to describe it as devoid of complete and absolute unity. One may well ask, then, "How did James positively characterize the world? What was reality for James?" He himself said that reality is experience—lived experience. For James, reality and experience were co-extensive terms.

For the purposes of this thesis, we must determine what there was about reality, as James encountered it, which forced him not only to include faith in his de facto description of it but also to posit faith as a decisive factor in its discovery and evolution. To do this, we must consider in depth the 'nature' of experience in James's metaphysics and give special attention to those relations among the various parts of experience which are involved in the phenomena of knowledge and action.

Experience, from James's point of view, is not merely the condition of subjectivity or awareness, as it has so often been defined by others, although certainly awareness cannot be excluded from it. Nor is experience exclusively the things of which we are aware. One might be tempted to say that experience, for James, is made up of thoughts and things, or of things and thoughts, depending upon where one chooses to place the priority. And there is a sense in which one would be correct. But the statement would need much clarification
before it could be said to represent James's position with any degree of accuracy, for the meanings which James gave to 'thought' and 'thing' are not immediately evident. James did not see thought and thing as two fundamentally different kinds of reality, differing as body and soul, matter and spirit, differ in traditional metaphysics. From his point of view, things are as they are experienced—things are their appearances. James had no experience of any special stuff out of which thoughts are made. He experienced no 'thought-stuff' which differed fundamentally from the stuff out of which things are made. Thus he asserted that there is no empirically discoverable 'matter' found in one and not in the other. Thought and thing, James said, are but two different names given in retrospect to one and the same moment in experience when it is considered in relation to different contexts.

Explicating this point further, James called a given moment in experience, considered as immediately present, pure experience. He defined pure experience as the "instant field of the present"\(^7\)—as plain unqualified actuality or existence which is only virtually thought or thing, subject or object. Of what 'stuff' is this pure experience made? James said that there is no general 'stuff' of which it is made.

There are as many stiffs as there are 'natures' in the things experienced. If you ask what any one bit of pure experience is made of, the answer is always the same: "It is made of that, of just what appears, of space, of intensity, of flatness, brownness, heaviness,

\(^7\)Ibid., p. 23.
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.8

In this description of pure experience, the term 'thought' is conspicuously absent. Where in James's account of experience does thought appear? And what difference did James see between the thought of heat and the thing, heat, for example? James held that in the immediate experience of heat there is only the datum—the phenomenon—simply heat. There is in this immediate datum no distinction between heat and the thought of heat. But in a second, retrospective experience, the simple 'that' of the first experience can be seen to figure in different contexts. As considered in relation to a man's other thoughts, as continuous with them, as coming at a certain point in his mental history, the heat figures as a thought, feeling or sensation. (James sometimes used the term 'thought' broadly to signify any mental state.) But the same datum considered as related to other physical objects—to the flame from which it comes, to the hearth on which the fire is, to the logs burning, to one's body being warmed—figures as a thing, as an object. Thus thought and thing, the feeling of heat and the heat felt, are, from James's point of view, just two designations of one and the same indivisible fact properly called the datum, the phenomenon, or the experience. And in the datum per se there is no dualism of subject and object,

8 Ibid., pp. 26-27.
of consciousness and the content of consciousness. The subjectivity and objectivity of the experience are functional attributes only, which, James said, are realized only when the experience is "'taken,' i.e., talked-of, twice, considered along with its two differing contexts respectively, by a new retrospective experience, of which that whole past complication now forms the fresh content."

From the point of view of James, then, reality is experience. Experience is but a collective name for all the sensible natures appearing in time and space—a collective name for all phenomena. But because of the various ways in which phenomena are related in experience, they become classed as thoughts and things, as mental states and objects of mental states. Of all the experienced relations in which phenomena exist, the most intimate of all relations is the one in virtue of which a datum of experience becomes classified as a mental state, the relationship in virtue of which it is considered part of the mental life of one individual person. No relationship is more intimate than this relationship between two experiences, two states of mind, the second of which is immediately conscious of continuing the first. Some thoughts are isolated from each other as my thoughts are isolated from yours. But other thoughts consciously continue each other, as my present thought continues my past. And when thoughts are thus aware of continuing and belonging with other thoughts,

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9 Ibid., p. 23.
we have a stream of consciousness called a self. "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 actually to compen­trate and suffuse each other's being." \(^{10}\)

Empirically, a self involves a series of experiences consciously continuing each other, a stream of conscious thought. The nucleus of this self at any given moment, James said, is experienced as the bodily existence warmly felt to be present at the time and the sense of intimate activity accompanying it. Attempting to explain the sense of continuing self-­identity which each person has, James pointed out that a present experience in the stream of thought can remember those which preceded it and can know the objects which those experiences knew. When a present experience looks back on past objects of thought, it finds that some have about them the same warmth and intimacy which pervades the present experience. On the other hand, others (experiences thought of as having occurred to other people, for example) lack this warm and intimate character. Any remembered object of thought, any remembered past experience, which brings to consciousness the same warmth and intimacy which accompanies the present experience is appropriated by the present experience as 'mine'—as me. James said that we assimilate all such appropriated experiences to each other.

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 45.
and to the "warm and intimate self we now feel within us as we think" and we separate them as a group from all those experiences which do not have this warmth and intimacy—in other words, we separate the me from the not-me. The world described for us by James, then, is a pluralistic world in which reality is experience—experience involving multiple phenomena related in diverse ways. And in virtue of certain of these relations we are able to distinguish in experience between thoughts and things, more precisely between


[12] Empiricists, less radical than James, found it more difficult to explain man's consciousness of personal identity, because they had overlooked the experienced transition by which one thought flows into and is consciously continued by another when they both belong to the same self. For James, this "co-conscious" transition was one of those relations among the parts of experience which he directly apprehended. "Within each of our personal histories, subject, object, interest and purpose are continuous or may be continuous. Personal histories are processes of change in time, and the change itself is one of the things immediately experienced." (William James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 48.) Hume overlooked this experience of change and transition and described the mind in terms of such loose and separate representations, that the rationalists felt compelled to look around for some suprasensible agent to unite the otherwise discontinuous items of experience. Traditional scholastic metaphysics had already employed a substantial soul as the undivided subject of diverse thoughts and feelings; but the rationalistic monists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries solved the problem by positing an Absolute of some kind as the repository of all the disjointed experiences of men. According to James, if one is a radical empiricist, no trans-empirical agency—neither the substantial soul of traditional metaphysics nor the Absolute of the monists—is necessary to hold one's experiences together. They hold together by themselves. My thoughts flow into one another and the continuous transition is something felt by me. Although James's explanation of the consciousness of personal identity may not be totally satisfying, it represents a noteworthy attempt to describe the 'I' or the 'me' entirely in empirical terms.
streams of consciousness and objects of consciousness. Thus we find that among its realities, James's world includes personal selves. One may well ask, however, whether there is any room in his universe for personal selves other than human beings--whether human consciousness need be considered the highest kind of consciousness.

As a matter of fact, James saw nothing in experience to militate against the view that there are other consciousnesses in existence--consciousnesses which are superhuman. Furthermore, James held that there are certain types of experience (which an empiricist who is radical enough cannot overlook) that point to the reality of such superhuman consciousness. The experiences of life following upon death--of new heights of power and happiness following upon despair, for example--of joy based upon giving up one's own will and letting something higher work for him--all such experiences show us a world in which all is well, in spite of sorrow, pain, tragedy, and death. They point in the direction of a world wider in scope than the one we ordinarily see, a spiritual world of which our visible world is just a part and "from which it draws its chief significance." They point to the existence of some form of superhuman life with which we may, unknown to ourselves, be co-conscious and which we may call 'God' if we wish. James assented to the reality of such a God on the grounds that he produces real effects in the world--in the

sense that prayer, communion with him, and obedience to what we consider his demands seem to produce real salutary effects upon our personal centers of energy. We shall learn more about the God in whom James felt inclined to believe in a later chapter. For now, let it suffice to say that James's God cannot be identified with the Absolute of the rationalists.¹⁴

Thus far, personal beings have been described primarily in terms of consciousness and, therefore, in terms of their functions as knowers. But men, the personal consciousnesses with which we are most familiar, are not merely knowing beings; they are desiring and acting beings as well. And all of these terms—knowing (sensing, feeling, thinking, reflecting), desiring, and acting—refer to possible relations which personal beings can have to other parts of experience, i.e. to the things in the world and to other persons. To some extent, all of these relations have both interested and yet baffled philosophers for centuries. That relation with which philosophers have been most frequently preoccupied has been the cognitive relation.

¹⁴According to James, a God conceived after the fashion of rationalistic monism, a God conceived to be absolute, infinite, eternal, unchanging, all-embracing and without a history, is totally foreign to our experience and is thus totally foreign to us—a monstrosity, he suggested. There can be no common ground for communication with such a God—no basis for sympathy, trust, love or cooperation. The only way to avoid the foreignness, strangeness, and paradoxical character of the monistic world of the Absolute, James said, is to be frankly pluralistic and to assume that the superhuman consciousness, however vast it may be, has itself an external environment and is therefore finite. In James's opinion, theism in these terms is a very strong probability that follows from experience taken in the widest sense.
For centuries, philosophers have struggled with the problem of how to bridge the supposed gap between knower and object known. Subject and object being treated as discontinuous entities, the presence of the object to the subject has always been a very mysterious thing. How is it possible that one reality can be in two places at one time—in outer space and in one's mind? A great portion of the history of philosophy is the story of the various theories which have been invented to try to solve this paradox. Representative theories posited an image or mental representation of some sort to act as a kind of intermediary between knower and object. William James, however, felt that representative theories violated the individual's sense of life, for a person knows no intervening mental image between himself and the thing perceived but seems to see the object immediately as it physically exists. At least James himself experienced no such intervening image and he took the evidence from his experience as primary. Other theories, which James labeled common-sense theories, left the supposed separation between knower and object known untouched and assumed that the mind is able to clear it by a kind of self-transcending leap. Transcendentalist theories, characteristic of certain rationalists, declared that the gap is impossible to bridge by finite knowers and that the only possible explanation of knowing is in terms of an Absolute, for whom knower and thing known are both objects.

James, however, took experience as he found it, with all of its felt conjunctions and transitions, and saw that it was
not necessary to resort to any artificial inventions in order to close the gap between knower and object known. James found that it was possible to describe cognition intelligibly entirely in terms of his experience without calling upon any trans-empirical powers to make it possible. The cognitive relation can be described adequately, he said, in terms of the felt conjunctions in one's experience without introducing any artificial intermediaries between his thoughts and things.

James gave us just such a description in "A World of Pure Experience" in which he explained what knower and object are empirically known as.

Either the knower and the known are:

1. the self-same piece of experience taken twice over in different contexts; or they are
2. two pieces of actual experience belonging to the same subject, with definite tracts of conjunctive transitional experience between them; or
3. the known is a possible experience either of that subject or another, to which the said conjunctive transitions would lead, if sufficiently prolonged.  

In the first instance, we have knowledge of perception—knowledge in which the mind has direct acquaintance with a present object. The second and third cases are both instances of conceptual knowledge in which the mind has 'knowledge about' an object that is not present. We alluded to perceptual knowledge above when we discussed the difference between the thought of heat and the thing, heat.  

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15 James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 53.
16 Above, pp. 39-40.
but two designations of one and the same indivisible fact or item of experience. In perceptual knowledge, as experienced, there is no duality of subject and object to be overcome; there is no gap between knower and thing known. In perceptual or intuitive knowledge, the mental content and the object are identical; we experience no intermediaries between thought and thing at the moment in which an object, such as this piece of paper, is intuited by us. "The paper is in the mind and the mind is around the paper, because paper and mind are only two names that are given later to the one experience, when, taken in a larger world of which it forms a part, its connections are traced in different directions."17 The separation of a given piece of immediate experience into consciousness and the content of consciousness results from adding to it different sets of experiences in connection with which it performs different functions. The pure experience of heat, referred to earlier, is the point of intersection of two processes which connect it with different groups of associates. One process is a man's personal biography. The datum, the pure experience, the phenomenon, is the last term of a series of "sensations, emotions, decisions, movements, classifications, expectations, etc., ending in the present, and the first term of a series of similar 'inner' operations extending into the future, . . ."18

The other process is one in which the datum. heat, is the

17 William James, "The Knowledge of Things Together," The Writings of William James, p. 156-57.
18 W. J. says in Radical Empiricism, p. 13.
terminus ad quem of a lot of previous physical operations—felling trees, cutting logs, carrying wood, laying the wood, lighting the fire—and the terminus a quo of certain future operations such as illuminating the room, warming the room and all that is in it, smoldering, smoking, dying out, etc. The datum, the pure experience, 'heat,' is the intersection of these two processes. And a second retrospective experience can consider the datum as figuring in both lines of activity. Considered as part of the process known as one's personal history, the experience functions as knower; considered as part of the train of physical operations, the experience functions as known. Thus James avoids the problem of bridging the gap between knower and known in perceptual knowledge by recognizing that knower and known are in fact identified in the immediate experience, i.e. at the moment of intuition.

In explaining conceptual knowledge, James did not bridge the gap between knower and known by identifying them as he did in the case of intuitive knowledge. In conceptual knowledge knower and known are distinct; nevertheless, knowing in this case does not involve any sort of trans-empirical leap. On the contrary, knower and known are distinct portions of experience, and the knowing itself is the experienced transition from an earlier piece of experience to a later piece which the first piece intends. Conceptual knowledge is knowledge about an object that is not immediately present, and it consists in the pointing of one's thought to that object. It is the knowing of absent experiences and consists in passing smoothly
towards them through the intermediate experiences which intervene between the present thought or concept, considered as knower, and the absent experience, considered as object. In his essay, "The Tigers of India," James said that conceptual knowledge of an object such as the tigers in India amounts to mentally pointing to them from wherever we are, assuming that we are not in their immediate presence. What did he mean by 'pointing'? Or rather what is this 'pointing' known as by us? How is this pointing experienced?

The pointing of our thought to the tigers is known simply and solely as a procession of mental associates and motor consequences that follow on the thought, and that would lead harmoniously, if followed out, into some ideal or real context, or even into the immediate presence, of the tigers. It is known as our rejection of a jaguar, if that beast were shown us as a tiger; as our assent to a genuine tiger if so shown. It is known as our ability to utter all sorts of propositions which don't contradict other propositions that are true of the real tigers. It is even known, if we take the tigers very seriously, as actions of ours which may terminate in directly intuited tigers, as they would if we took a voyage to India for the purpose of tiger hunting and brought back of lot of skins of the striped rascals which we had laid low.

In this example, the thought of the tigers is the knower which is joined by conjunctive transitional experience to the perceptual experience of the tigers (assuming that we go to India to see them). And the percept of the tigers is the object known.

To take another example, if while sitting in his bedroom a man thinks of a photograph which he believes to be hidden

19James, Pragmatism and Four Essays from The Meaning of Truth, p. 226.
in an old Bible on his library shelf, and if he gets up, walks to the library, looks on the shelf, finds the Bible, opens it, and finds the photograph, his thought of the photo when he was sitting in his room can now be said to have been truly cognitive of the photograph hidden in the Bible. The percept of the photo is what his idea of it meant because his thought of it has passed into the percept by a series of conjunctive experiences. The felt transitions by which the concept of the photo was finally corroborated is all that the knowing of a percept by an idea can possibly mean from a purely empirical—i.e., a radically empirical—point of view. The percept of the photograph in this instance not only verifies the concept, but the percept's existence as the terminus of the chain of intermediary experiences actually creates the concept's function of knowing.

James held that conceptual knowledge is made conceptual knowledge wholly by the existence of things that fall outside of the knowing experience itself, i.e., by intermediary experiences and by a terminal percept into which the conceptual experience leads and which seems to fulfill it. But can the knowledge be said to be present before the intermediary experiences occur and the fulfilling terminal percept is attained? James distinguished between knowing as verified and completed and the same knowing in transit or in process. It is only when our idea of an object has terminated actually in the percept of the object that we know 'for certain' that from the beginning the idea was truly cognitive of that thing. "Until
established by the end of the process, its quality of knowing that, or indeed of knowing anything, could still be doubted; and yet the knowing really was there, as the result now shows.\textsuperscript{20}

In other words, we were \textit{virtual} knowers of the object "long before we were certified to have been its actual knowers, by the percept's retroactive validating power."\textsuperscript{21} James claimed that the greater part of all our knowing never gets beyond this virtual stage. Obviously, our thinking about imperceptible things never gets beyond this point, because in this case, a verifying perceptual experience is not possible. But even when perceptual verification is possible, we often cannot afford to wait for such verification because immediate action may be necessary.\textsuperscript{22} In such instances, if there is no contradicting truth in view, we often \textit{assume} our ideas to be true and act accordingly. But to assume our ideas to be true without verification is an act of faith. Since the greater part of our knowing never gets beyond this virtual stage—the greater part of our 'knowing' involves faith of some kind or other.

To continue thinking unchallenged is, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, our practical substitute for

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{20}James, \textit{Essays in Radical Empiricism}, p. 68.
  \item \textsuperscript{21}Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{22}James himself had experienced the kind of paralysis which is attendant upon that attitude which prompts us to wait for proof before we act. In the emotional crisis of his youth, he had been, to some extent, paralyzed by doubts—doubts about freedom, his creative powers, the ultimate value of his activities. And he learned by painful experience that if we insist that the fruits of our actions be certified in advance, we may never act at all.
\end{itemize}
knowing in the completed sense. As each experience runs by cognitive transition into the next one, and we nowhere feel a collision with what we elsewhere count as truth or fact, we commit ourselves to the current as if the port were sure. 23

Thus James succeeded in explaining knowledge, both perceptual (intuitive) and conceptual, entirely in terms of experience as he lived it and the transitions which he felt therein, thereby avoiding the usual epistemological problem of getting knower and known together. In perceptual knowledge, he said, there is no gap between knower and object to be overcome because knower and object are one and the same bit of immediate experience considered from two points of view. And in conceptual knowledge, knower and object are two pieces of experience, an idea and a percept, actually or potentially joined by a series of experiences fluidly passing into each other. When the conjunction is actual, the percept is felt as fulfilling the idea.

As we saw earlier, however, the cognitive relation is only one of the possible relations which those parts of experience known as personal selves can have with other parts of experience. Men are not merely cognitive beings; they are active beings as well. In fact, for James, the most important thing about a man is not what he knows (although that is important too) but his conduct, his actions. According to James, knowledge is for the sake of activity. The purpose of knowledge is to enable man to exercise his volitional powers in

23 James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 69.
effective and fruitful activity in the world. And activity, in the sense of desiring and willing as well as the physical activities which follow upon them, is important because by means of it man moulds his own character, creates to a large extent his own experiences; modifies his environment and thus fashions the world in the sense of changing it, completing it, and making it better or worse.

It is an empirical fact that men desire (wish for and will) to feel, to do, and to have all kinds of things which presently are not felt, done or had. For James, the presence of desires in the world makes it a world of good and evil. For the good is that which is desired by some conscious being; it is that which is appreciated and enjoyed by such a being; in short, it is that which is felt to be good by some one.

So far as a person "feels anything to be good, he makes it

24 It is true that the flux of pure sensational experience seems to be simply given. And it is simply given to the newly born infant; but once the very first impression has been made upon the infant's sense, he reacts; and from then on his activities can so modify his environment that even future given sensations may in part owe their being to him. Furthermore, in regard to pure sensational experience, man exercises a certain selective activity insofar as a man's sense organs respond to only a comparatively few of the infinite number of movements swarming about him. This selective activity continues when, from the flux of sensations, attention "picks out certain ones as worthy of its notice and suppresses all the rest." (James, The Principles of Psychology, I, 285.) Thus, under the influence of his own active nature, a man's world takes shape, and the things with which his world is furnished are products of his own selective attention. Things, said James, are nothing "but special groups of sensible qualities, which happen practically or aesthetically to interest us, to which we therefore give substantive names, and which we exalt to this exclusive status of independence and dignity." (Ibid.)
It is good at least for him. Goods are, in James's words, "objects of feeling and desire," the essence of good being "simply to satisfy demand."

Correlatively, evil is the frustration of desire; it is that which is repugnant or painful to a conscious being; it is that which is felt to be bad or evil by someone. In James's view, if there were no beings with conscious desires in the world, no beings to feel things to be good or evil, there would be no good or evil. As it is, however, the world contains both. It contains good insofar as there are things desired, appreciated and enjoyed by men; it contains evil insofar as there are frustrated desires, repugnances, suffering, and pain.

The presence in the world of desires and human judgments of good and bad makes the world to be not only a world of good and evil but an ethical world as well. For every desire, by the very fact that it exists, constitutes a valid claim on the part of the person who experiences that desire. And wherever a claim is made by one consciousness, there is an obligation incumbent upon another. In James's words, "... every de facto claim creates in so far forth an obligation... Any desire is imperative to the extent of its amount; it makes itself

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26 Ibid., p. 197.

27 Ibid., p. 201.
valid by the fact that it exists at all."\textsuperscript{28} Thus, for James, every good, insofar as it is related in one way or another to desire (either as its object or its fulfillment) is in some sense a moral good. In fact, James says, "there are no non-moral goods."\textsuperscript{29}

The universe, for James, is thus an ethical universe—a universe of experienced desires and, therefore, a universe of claims and corresponding obligations. Desires and claims, however, frequently conflict and it is not always possible to satisfy all demands. In the case of conflict, how does one decide which claim should be fulfilled? James said that the guiding principle of moral philosophy should be to satisfy as many claims as possible.

Since everything which is demanded is by that fact a good, must not the guiding principle for ethical philosophy (since all demands conjointly cannot be satisfied in this poor world) be simply to satisfy at all times as many demands as we can? That act must be the best act, accordingly, which makes for the best whole, in the sense of awakening the least sum of dissatisfactions.\textsuperscript{30}

But it is often impossible to know in advance and with certitude which act will make for the best whole. Certitude in ethical matters seems to be a practical impossibility inasmuch as every real dilemma of this sort is unique. And this points up the problem involved in all human activity—a problem the solution to which, as we shall discover, requires the recogni-

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., p. 195.
\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 209.
\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., p. 205.
faith as a legitimate spring-board for action.

Action follows upon belief; it presupposes conviction. 31

Doubt and indecision mean inactivity. And yet, from the point of view of James’s radical empiricism, absolute certainty regarding matters of fact—i.e., absolute certainty based upon empirical evidence or rational demonstration—seems to be practically impossible. Except for the datum of the immediate present, which we always without hesitation believe, it is always possible to doubt our judgments, as the following considerations will show.

The ideal, of course, is to be able to act on verified principles. For this reason, men persistently seek the verification of their beliefs. The scientist, for example, aims to have his theories empirically corroborated. He begins with an idea, an hypothesis, and is led by it to perform a series of operations and experiments which he hopes will terminate in a perceptual experience that will be the fulfillment and verification of his original idea. But even when verification is attained, from the point of view of the empiricist, the verified proposition is still subject to further qualification.

31 James’s position on the relationship of belief to action was undoubtedly influenced not only by James’s own experience but also by the thought of his friend and fellow member of "The Metaphysical Club," Charles Peirce. In "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," Peirce spoke of belief as "a rule for action." (Philosophical Writings of Peirce, ed. by Justus Buchler [New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1955], p. 28.) And in "The Fixation of Belief," he wrote, "Our beliefs guide our desires and shape our actions." (Ibid., pp. 9-10.) Belief "puts us into such a condition that we shall behave in some certain way when the occasion arises." (Ibid., p. 10.)
and correction. As James told us, radical empiricism considers its most assured conclusions regarding matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience, because experienced reality is constantly changing and what may be true of a given segment of it today may not necessarily be true of similar instances of it tomorrow.

Furthermore, there is no absolute point of view. The world of radical empiricism is a world of many minds, minds which are for practical purposes conterminous, i.e., they meet in the same objects. But even though the same object may be known by more than one person, no two persons perceive it from precisely the same posture. No two people share identical

32 How does a radical empiricist like James know that there are other minds in existence? In his own words—"Why do I postulate your mind? Because I see your body acting in a certain way. Its gestures, facial movements, words and conduct generally are 'expressive,' so I deem it actuated as my own is, by an inner life like mine. This argument from analogy is my reason, whether an instinctive belief runs before it or not. But what is 'your body' here but a percept in my field? It is only as animating that object, my object, that I have any occasion to think of you at all. . . . In that perceptual part of my universe which I call your body, your mind and my mind meet and may be called conterminous. Your mind actuates that body and mine sees it; my thoughts pass into it as into their harmonious cognitive fulfilment; your emotions and volitions pass into it as causes into their effects." (James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, pp. 77-78.)

33 James held that men's minds meet in a world of objects which they share in common and which would still be there if one or several of the minds were destroyed. James wrote that if "one and the same experience can figure twice, once in a mental and once in a physical context . . . , one does not see why it might not figure thrice, or four times, or any number of times, by running into as many different mental contexts, just as the same point, lying at their intersection, can be continued into many different lines." (James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 80.) James claimed that abolishing any number of mental streams would not destroy the experience itself or its other contexts.
perspectives or see the same object in exactly the same way; and no one man, from James's point of view, perceives an object in its entirety with all of its actual and possible relationships. Thus no single person knows any thing completely; no one knows all that can be said about it. What may be true of it from one perspective, in one particular relationship, may not be true of it from another perspective or in another relationship. Furthermore, each man sees an object in a unique light, the unique light provided by all of his past experience (which is never identical with any one else's) and by all of his previously espoused convictions and beliefs; and just as a visible object may appear differently in lights of various wave lengths, so the same object may appear differently to different persons in the light of their unique past experiences. This fact was forcibly impressed upon James himself by the many debates in which he engaged with family and friends, all of whom were sincere and honest in their search for truth. The fact that they did not all see reality in the same way made it clear to James that it is not possible to consider the judgment of any one mind about an object as the absolutely incorrigible truth about the matter.

The history of human thought is to a great extent the history of men's disputes about what is true or not true of the universe and about how men should act or not act in relation to the universe. It is also the history of men's attempts to settle these disputes. The most satisfactory way of resolving such issues, of course, is to point to the data of experience
verifying one hypothesis rather than another. Experience, however, is not always obliging enough to provide the needed data; on the other hand, it is at times too obliging, for not infrequently experience supports both hypotheses equally and leaves the issue thus unsettled, at least as far as empirical proof is concerned. Moreover, in regard to practical issues, experience never tells us in advance how successful or unsuccessful a particular course of action will actually be.

William James put forth his theory of pragmatism as a method of settling men's disputes about reality and about their practical relations with it. But, as a brief consideration of his pragmatism will reveal, even it does not resolve issues so completely that there is no longer any possibility of doubt or need for faith. Although James speaks of pragmatism as a method, it is obviously more than a method; for a method of settling disputes must involve a theory of truth as well. As a method, pragmatism attempts to interpret each conflicting hypothesis by tracing its respective practical consequences. If the consequences of one alternative are in no way different from those of another, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing and all dispute is idle. James's pragmatic rule states that the meaning of a concept may always be found, if not in some sensible particular which it directly designates, then in some particular difference in the course of human experience which its being true will make. "There can be no difference anywhere that doesn't make a difference elsewhere--no difference in abstract truth that doesn't
express itself in a difference in concrete fact and in conduct consequent upon that fact, imposed on somebody, somehow, somewhere, and somewhen."34 One can see in James's position not only his radically empirical attitude but also the importance which he placed upon action. Knowledge is for the sake of action; and if two theories involve no differences whatsoever in the human conduct consequent upon their being accepted as true, then for practical purposes the two theories are the same.35 Any dispute about them is idle speculation and a waste of time.36

But let us suppose that the practical consequences of one theory are different from those of another. How does one decide which of the two theories is the true one? There must be some criteria if the dispute is not to be settled arbitrarily. In

34James, Pragmatism and Four Essays from The Meaning of Truth, p. 45.

35The influence of Charles Peirce upon James is apparent. In "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," Peirce wrote, "... different beliefs are distinguished by the different modes of action to which they give rise. If beliefs do not differ in this respect, if they appease the same doubt by producing the same rule of action, then no mere differences in the manner of consciousness of them can make them different beliefs, any more than playing a tune in different keys is playing different tunes." (Philosophical Writings of Peirce, p. 29.)

36James's intensely active and moralistic nature forbade him to waste time over merely academic questions, because he felt that it was action that mattered not mere speculation. In early manhood, James was prone to such seemingly idle speculation and saw it as a fault which he resolved to overcome. "For the remainder of the year, I will abstain from the mere speculation and contemplative Grublei in which my nature takes most delight, and voluntarily cultivate the feeling of moral freedom, by reading books favorable to it, as well as by acting. ... For the present then remember: care little for speculation; much for the form of my action; recollect that only when habits of order are formed can we advance to really interesting fields of action--and consequently accumulate grain on grain of willful choice like a very miser; ..." ("Diary," The Writings of William James, pp. 7-8.)
oversimplified terms, the true idea is the idea that works.

In Pragmatism, James explained:

... ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience, to summarize them and get about among them by conceptual short-cuts instead of following the interminable succession of particular phenomena. Any idea upon which we can ride, so to speak; any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally.37

James tried to show that the pragmatic notion of truth is not unlike that of the traditionalists who defined truth as the agreement of our ideas with reality. However, he interpreted the terms, 'reality' and 'agreement,' somewhat more broadly than the traditionalists did. When James said that our ideas must agree with reality in order to be true, he recognized three kinds of realities with which ideas must be in harmony: 1) concrete sensible facts; 2) relations among purely mental ideas, i.e., abstract principles and definitions and the relations intuitively perceived among them—truths of logic and mathematics, for example; and 3) the whole body of other truths which we have already made our own. How do our ideas agree with such realities? In a narrow sense, an idea can agree with a reality by copying it. But for James, the word 'agree' had a broader meaning. To put it succinctly, an idea will agree with the three kinds of realities mentioned 1) if it is either sensibly verifiable or at least not in

37 James, Pragmatism and Four Essays from The Meaning of Truth, p. 49.
contradiction with concrete sensible facts, 2) if it is logically consistent and consistent with our abstract knowledge in general, and 3) if it is either supported by, or at least in harmony with, all of our other beliefs about the world. Ideas that thus agree with reality work. They work in the sense that by believing them we can get about among the parts of our experience much more easily than if we did not believe. If nothing else, they work in the very minimal sense of not obstructing our progress as we move about in the empirical world.38

For James, then, true ideas are ideas that work, ideas that put us in good working touch with reality. But even when, by the pragmatic method, one has decided which of two ideas works best, which one he will count as true, the issue is never absolutely settled for all time. Since reality is continually changing, what works now may not always work. Thus even those conclusions arrived at pragmatically are never entirely incorrigible. Doubt is always possible in regard to

38 James explained the agreement of an idea with reality as follows: "To 'agree' in the widest sense with a reality can only mean to be guided either straight up to it or into its surroundings, or to be put into such working touch with it as to handle either it or something connected with it better than if we disagreed. Better either intellectually or practically! And often agreement will only mean the negative fact that nothing contradictory from the quarter of that reality comes to interfere with the way in which our ideas guide us elsewhere... The essential thing is the process of being guided. Any idea that helps us to deal, whether practically or intellectually, with either the reality or its belongings, that doesn't entangle our progress in frustrations, that fits, in fact, and adapts our life to the reality's whole setting, will agree sufficiently to meet the requirement. It will hold true of that reality." (James, Pragmatism and Four Essays from The Meaning of Truth, p. 140.)
The good life, however, presupposes conviction. The good life is the moral life, the life to which James himself aspired and to which he resolved to dedicate himself. It is a life of productive human activity in which one fashions the world and himself in such a way as to minimize the evil and the pain and to maximize the good and its accompanying joys. James held that the very purpose of thought and reflection is to facilitate such fruitful human conduct. But responsible human conduct presupposes belief—not merely opinion held as such—but conviction, for doubt and indecision result in apathy and inaction. Here James's view of knowledge seems to present a stumbling block, because on his radically empiricist principles, absolute certainty certified by evidence is rarely, if ever, possible in regard to matters of fact. On experiential grounds, a life of responsible moral action is thus impossible—impossible unless some other springboard for action can be found beside the belief that is certified by proof. We have two alternatives. Either we do not act at all or we act on an assumption; either we do not act at all or we act on faith.

Faith, which is a believing attitude adopted on non-cognitive grounds, is necessary for human life, James said, not only because without it doubt would paralyze us most of the time but also because the moral life, qua moral, requires it. Moral action, the opposite of determined, instinctive action, must be responsible and free. To act morally is to act freely and to be aware of one's freedom and one's consequent
responsibility. But in James's view, free will is not something which can be demonstrated or empirically proven. Hence, if one accepts it, he must accept it on faith as James himself did after reading Renouvier in 1870. Thus the moral life, qua moral, presupposes faith not only in the course of action one chooses to follow but in one's own freedom as well.

In summary, we may say that the world, as experienced by James and as interpreted in his philosophy, is such that human fulfillment, as well as the development and perfection of the world as a whole, requires the exercise of faith on the part of human beings. The world, as James lived in it and understood it, is a world of changing, multiple phenomena--a world whose future is open--a world that is plastic in the hands of men. And men, James held, are primarily active beings. By their activities, not only do men create their own personalities, fashion their own lives, and shape their own destinies, but also they make the world itself to be what it is. The world becomes better or worse in proportion to the quality of each human life within it. The good in the world can be augmented, James believed, and the evil lessened by responsible action on the part of human beings. Such responsible action, however, presupposes conviction. And since the changing character of experience and the limits of human knowledge make that conviction which is certified by proof impossible in most practical situations, the responsible human action by which man fulfills himself and perfects the world requires the exercise of faith.

James thus affirmed the need for faith in the lives of
all men; and his affirmation was a philosophical one based upon his reflections on the changing character of reality--his reflections on man, man's active relationship to the world, and the apparent limitations of human knowledge.

The distinctively human need for faith, however, was an exigency which James himself personally and urgently felt. And he allowed faith to play a prominent role in his own life—even in his philosophical speculation. To permit faith to influence one's philosophical views was, of course, a cardinal sin from rationalistic and positivistic points of view. But from James's point of view, there was no other choice. On the one hand, his empiricist view of knowledge made absolute proven certitude in most philosophical questions impossible. On the other hand, his moralism forbade forever suspending judgment—at least on matters so vital. Thus James was left with no alternative except faith. It was either faith or mental nullity and moral impotence. And James opted for faith. It became part and parcel of his pragmatic method insofar as that method allowed him to accept any hypothesis and act upon it if consequences useful to life flowed from it, even though no empirical verification was readily available.

Furthermore, James used this pragmatic method himself in determining some of the fundamental features of his own world view—in arguing against materialism, for example, in fighting determinism, and in defending theism.

Thus James's moralism, the changing character of reality, the limits of purely empirical knowledge, and the practical
necessity of dealing with the broader questions of existence forced James to make a place for faith in his philosophical view of life. But even if they had not, James would have had to take cognizance of faith at least as an empirical datum. Rightly or wrongly, the men of his day, like the men of every era, did believe without clinching evidence. Human faith, religious and otherwise, was an experienced fact then as it is now. And a radical empiricist who could exclude nothing of experience from the matter of philosophy would have to philosophize about faith—asking what it is, whence it comes, and whether or not it is legitimate. James asked himself these very questions and to his own satisfaction established faith as a valid mental attitude. As we shall see in the following chapters, from the viewpoint of his philosophy, which is at once radically empiricist in its outlook and moralistic in its aims, faith is an indispensable part of life and must be considered as a legitimate mental attitude providing a legitimate basis for human action.
CHAPTER III
THE VOLITIONAL QUALITY OF BELIEF

William James, whose radically empiricist principles forbade him to exclude anything of experience from the matter of philosophy, could hardly avoid philosophizing about faith. He had to deal with faith because it is a datum of experience that people do believe when the evidence is inconclusive. Moreover, a philosophy which is both empirical, insofar as it denies the existence of absolute certainty unless it occurs in the usual course of experience, and moralistic by its placing the value of life in responsible action grounded on personal conviction must provide some basis for action other than the certitude guaranteed by the theoretical posture of proof and demonstration. Assuming that certainty guaranteed by evidence is unattainable in most practical problems, the other possible basis for responsible action is the certainty of faith, i.e., belief which is determined by man's volitional nature in the absence of any substantiating proof. To have faith is to believe when it is still theoretically possible to doubt and involves a willingness to act even though the successful outcome of one's action is not certified in advance. An act of faith involves believing when the evidence available is insufficient to force the mind to assent. In such a case,
i.e., in a case in which there is not sufficient evidence to force assent, if a man believes, he believes because he chooses to do so for reasons other than evidential. However, his reasons, while non-cognitive, are nevertheless empirical and may include preference, desire, emotion, and need, especially the need to act effectively in the concrete situations of life. To a greater or less degree, all men live by faith and rightly so. It is not only a justifiable attitude of man's mind; but it is a practical necessity for fruitful human existence.

The value of faith has not always been admitted by philosophers. In James's own time, there were those thinkers who considered faith a type of intellectual vice. They were men who thought that faith was both irrational and unscientific—a vice in which a conscientious thinker, aware of his responsibility to seek truth and avoid error, would not allow himself to indulge. Their position implied that the primary duty of a knower is to avoid error; they held that believing in the face of insufficient evidence involves the unwarranted risk of making a mistake—a risk which a responsible thinker has no right to incur. The British mathematician and philosopher, William K. Clifford (1845-1879), wrote:

Belief is desecrated when given to unproved and unquestioned statements for the solace and private pleasure of the believer. . . . Whoso would deserve well of his fellows in this matter will guard the purity of his belief with a very fanaticism of jealous care, lest at any time it should rest on an unworthy object, and catch a stain which can never be wiped away. . . . If [a] belief has been accepted on insufficient evidence [even though the belief be true, as Clifford on the same page explains] the pleasure is a stolen one. . . .
It is sinful because it is stolen in defiance of our duty to mankind. That duty is to guard ourselves from such beliefs as from a pestilence which may shortly master our own body and then spread to the rest of the town. ... It is wrong always, everywhere, and for every one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.¹

The position of men like Clifford was that belief, in order to be warranted, must rest entirely upon intellectual grounds, i.e., that belief can be justified only when it is supported by conclusive evidence. These thinkers claimed that preference, desire, and emotion may never lawfully determine a man's convictions. Because of their insistence upon the priority of the cognitive and the conceptual and their refusal to allow man's volitional nature any legitimate role to play in establishing his beliefs, James referred to these philosophers as Intellectualists. His use of the word 'Intellectualists,' however, needs some clarification. Because James did not always use the term in the same way, its exact meaning must be determined by the particular context in which we find it. At times, James used the word 'Intellectualists' in a narrow sense to refer to the rationalists with their emphasis upon the conceptual and the logical, as he did when he attacked the "vicious intellectualism"² of Francis H. Bradley and Josiah Royce. At other times, however, particularly when he was trying to defend faith against the attacks of those who would deny it any legitimate role in human life, James

²James, A Pluralistic Universe, p. 60.
broadened the terms to include anyone who would refuse to allow man's passion and volitional nature a part to play in the determination of his beliefs. In this sense, the Intellectualists were those who insisted that conviction is solely a matter of cognition, that a man's beliefs can lawfully be determined only by evidence—either in the form of sensible reality impressing itself upon the mind, or in the form of logical demonstration coercing the mind to assent. Using the term 'intellectualism' in this broadened sense, James spoke of two types of Intellectualists—the Rationalizing Intellectualists, among whom he included Bradley and Royce, and the Empiricist Intellectualists including such positivists as William K. Clifford and Karl Pearson.

Among intellectualists two parties may be distinguished. Rationalizing intellectualists lay stress on deductive and 'dialectic' arguments, making large use of abstract concepts and pure logic (Hegel, Bradley, Taylor, Royce). Empiricist intellectuals are more 'scientific,' and think that the character of the world must be sought in our sensible experiences, and found in hypotheses based exclusively thereon (Clifford, Pearson).  

However the Rationalizing Intellectualists and the Empiricist Intellectualists may have differed, their views on human knowledge and belief bore marked similarities to each other and were, on the other hand, strikingly different from those of William James. A brief consideration of the differences between the Intellectualists' position in regard to knowledge and belief and that of James will help us to understand...
stand more fully James's defense of faith in the chapters to follow.

A fundamental difference between James's view and that of the Intellectualists concerns the active character of the human mind. From the Intellectualists' point of view, the mind is essentially passive and receptive; it is, so to speak, merely a kind of recording device upon which reality somehow comes and registers itself. James, however, saw the human mind as essentially active; in his view, man's active and volitional nature has a vital part to play in all of man's mental activities--in sensation, in conceptualization, in reasoning, and above all in belief. First of all, man's active nature provides these processes with their very reason for being, for mental activity occurs primarily so that man can exercise his volitional powers in effective and fruitful action upon the world; secondly, man's volitional nature has a vital role to play in the internal mental processes themselves.

Considering the human mind as active in both of these senses, we shall examine first of all James's position regarding the mind's relation to external action. Unlike the Intellectualists who stressed man's function as a knower, James saw man basically as an agent--an agent whose task is not only to survive in a relatively hostile environment but also to complete and fulfill himself and the world by means of effective action. For the Intellectualists, man's glory is in knowing for the sake of knowing; but for James, man's glory is in purposeful action in the world and knowing is for the sake of
such action.

The differing views of the Intellectualists and James in regard to man and the purpose of knowledge imply differing views of the world itself. The Intellectualists' position implies that the world is already finished and complete and basically unaffected by man's life. The world, from their point of view, can be known by man, but he cannot change it or make it more perfect. "'Intellectualism' is the belief that our mind comes upon a world complete in itself, and has the duty of ascertaining its contents; but has no power of re-determining its character, for that is already given." 4

James's position, on the other hand, is that the world is plastic and open. It is incomplete and can be completed only by fruitful human activity. Man by his actions can change and perfect the universe; he can redetermine its character so that it will become a better place in which to live—better not only for himself but for his fellows as well. To do this, however, man must understand the world. He must understand it in order to know how to act effectively in relation to it. It is for the sake of such effective action that man seeks knowledge. James would not deny that an individual man may desire to know for knowing's sake. But this is a special interest and not the most basic drive behind the search for truth. A man seeks to know, James tells us, so that he will feel at home in the world, but being at home in the world means

4Ibid.
being able to act effectively in it. Most of the motives which
impel men to search for knowledge involve goods, both private
and public, which can be attained only by action.

Granted, then, that man's volitional nature supplies the
very reason for knowledge to occur, let us examine the part
which his volitional nature plays in the mental processes them­
selves, i.e., in sensing, conceptualizing, reasoning, and, more
importantly, in belief. From the Intellectualists' point of
view, the mind in these processes is basically passive; it is
acted upon in some way by the world and simply reflects or
mirrors the world's contents. For William James, however, the
human mind is internally active in all of these processes and
man's volitional nature functions in each of them insofar as
each one involves some kind of internal selective activity.

Even sensation, in which the mind is customarily thought
of as passive, involves selective activity from James's point
of view. True enough, the flux of sensational experience does
seem to be simply given. But a kind of selection occurs inso­
far as the number of stimuli to which a man's sense organs
respond are quite limited when compared to the infinite number
of movements which, scientists tell us, swarm about him. The
conformation of the organs of sense are such that they can be
said to 'select' those movements to which they will react.

To begin at the bottom, what are our very senses
themselves, . . . but organs of selection? Out of the
infinite chaos of movement, of which physics teaches
us that the outer world consists, each sense-organ
picks out those which fall within certain limits of
velocity. To these it responds, but ignores the rest
as completely as if they did not exist. Out of what
is in itself an undistinguishable, swarming continuum,
devoid of distinction or emphasis, our senses make for us, by attending to this motion and ignoring that, a world full of contrasts, of sharp accents, of abrupt changes, of picturesque light and shade.5

In the view of James, however, the selective activity does not stop with sensation. Conceptualization, likewise, involves a kind of 'choice,' insofar as attention selects from the flux of experience those sensations, or groups of sensations, which concretely interest a man.

If the sensations we receive from a given organ have their causes thus picked out for us by the conformation of the organ's termination, Attention, on the other hand, out of all the sensations yielded, picks out certain ones as worthy of notice and suppresses all the rest. We notice only those sensations which are signs to us of things which happen practically or aesthetically to interest us, to which we therefore give substantive names, and which we exalt to this exclusive status of independence and dignity.6

This selective activity by which attention cuts the sensible flux of experience up into 'things' is an integral part of the conceptual process. In James's words,

Out of this aboriginal sensible muchness attention carves out objects, which conception then names and identifies forever—in the sky 'constellations,' on the earth 'beach,' 'sea,' 'cliff,' 'bushes,' 'grass.' Out of time we cut 'days' and 'nights,' 'summers' and 'winters.' We say what each part of the sensible continuum is, and all these abstracted whats are concepts.7

In reasoning too, the active nature of man is operative. The Intellectualists, of course, did not consider the mind to be passive in reasoning in the same sense in which they


6Ibid.

7James, Some Problems of Philosophy, p. 50.
considered it to be passive in sensation and conception. For in reasoning, the mind is to some degree active, even from the Intellectualists' point of view, in the sense that it moves from premise to premise to conclusion. But in their view, man's volitional nature has no part to play in this process, and even in inference the mind is basically passive because it moves insofar as it is moved by the evidence and the force of logic.

The position of William James, of course, differs. In reasoning one takes a given fact, 'S,' and analyzes it into many attributes. He then notices one attribute 'M' which "he takes to be the essential part of the whole fact ['S'] before him." But since in his world, 'M' is always joined with consequence 'P,' the reasoner concludes that 'P' must also be conjoined with 'S.' In syllogistic form, 'M' is 'P,' 'S' is 'M,' \[\therefore 'S' is 'P.'\]

Which aspect of the complex fact, 'S,' is taken to be essential to it, however, depends upon the interests and purposes of the one reasoning. To use James's own example, a piece of paper has many characteristics--whiteness, flatness, thinness, suitability for writing, combustibility. Which aspect a man attends to as essential depends upon his purpose. If he wishes to light a fire, its combustibility is essential for his purpose. If he wishes to write a letter, its character as a writing surface is essential.\(^8\)

\(^8\)James, *Psychology*, p. 313.

\(^9\)From James's point of view, the reality of 'paper' is
Reasoning is always to attain some particular conclusion, or to gratify some special curiosity. It not only breaks up the datum placed before it and conceives it abstractly; it must conceive it rightly too; and conceiving it rightly means conceiving it by that one particular abstract character which leads to the one sort of conclusion which it is the reasoner's temporary interest to attain.10

Thus in inference, as in sensation and conceptualization, the volitional nature of man has a dual role to play. First, it provides the very purpose for which reasoning takes place. For reasoning occurs only to satisfy the individual person's interests, needs, and desires—to help him achieve his personal goals, the most important of which is effective human action in the world. "My thinking is first and last and always for the sake of my doing..."11 Secondly, the volitional nature of man is operative in the process of reasoning itself insofar as internal selective activity is an integral part of it. Moreover, the thinker's purpose, which inevitably involves some external action to be performed, provides the very principles of this internal selection.

Far richer than a single vision or perspective can reveal, and therefore it is not possible to point to one attribute which is its single essence. "All ways of conceiving a concrete fact, if they are true ways at all, are equally true ways. There is no property ABSOLUTELY essential to any one thing. The same property which figures as the essence of a thing on one occasion becomes a very inessential feature upon another." (James, Psychology, p. 315.) James insisted that "the only meaning of essence is teleological, and that classification and conception are purely teleological weapons of the mind." (Ibid., p. 317) "The essence of a thing," he wrote, "is that one of its properties which is so important for my interests that in comparison with it I may neglect the rest." (Ibid.)

10 James, Psychology, p. 318.
11 Ibid., p. 316.
The functioning of man's volitional nature is thus apparent in all of man's mental activities—in sensation and conception, processes by which the mind apprehends objects, and in reasoning, the process by which the mind draws conclusions about objects from the relations which it intuits between them. Sensation, conceptualization, and reasoning, however, are all antecedent to belief. And of these four, it is belief which is the most important for James, inasmuch as belief is a prerequisite for responsible moral action.

Belief, like the mental activities preceding it, involves man's active and volitional nature. In fact, all of man's beliefs, whether they are classed as instances of faith or not, have a non-cognitive, but nevertheless experiential, element in them insofar as man's emotional and volitional powers somehow enter into each one. The Intellectualists did not deny that these powers are in fact frequently involved in belief, but these men did deny the legitimacy of their influence. James, on the other hand, not only upheld the legitimacy of their influence, but said that the nature of belief is such that man's volitional powers cannot help being involved in every instance of it.

Although 'faith' and 'belief' are identified by many thinkers, James found it necessary to distinguish between the two terms. 'Belief' was the broader term for him, faith being considered a species of belief. James never strictly defined belief, but he did describe it in experiential terms.
Everyone knows the difference between imagining a thing and believing in its existence, between supposing a proposition and acquiescing in its truth. In the case of acquiescence or belief, the object is not only apprehended by the mind, but is held to have reality.¹²

Belief is the act by which we posit the reality of the world in which we live and act. It is the mental act of recognizing and accepting a thing as real and includes every degree of assurance, even the highest possible certainty and conviction. Belief is not the mere apprehension of a thing, as perception and conception are; rather it is an active affirmation of that thing as real and involves a willingness to stake one's whole person upon the item's reality.¹³ Belief involves a readiness and willingness to act in relation to the thing believed, to allow it to influence the course of our active lives. To believe in something means to allow it to play a role in the direction of our activities, whether in a vitally significant way or to the minimal degree that, in fashioning ourselves and the world by our actions, we at least take it into account.

Faith is an instance of belief; it is belief which outstrips the evidence and involves positing as real an object

¹²James, The Principles of Psychology, II, 283.

¹³The items proposed to a given man's belief are many and varied. They include not only the objects of human sense experience, but also complex conceptual objects such as the truths of mathematics, the propositions of science and philosophy, and the hypotheses of religion. In affirming the 'reality' of such complex conceptual objects, a man accepts them as true and is willing to live by them. In believing in these objects, he holds them to be true not merely in a theoretical way but he is willing to stake his person upon their truth by acting in accordance with them.
whose actuality is not proven either by empirical evidence or by rational demonstration. "Faith means belief in something concerning which doubt is still theoretically possible; and as the test of belief is willingness to act, one may say that faith is the readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance."\textsuperscript{14}

An understanding of faith requires an understanding of James's psychology of belief in general. According to James, belief, or the "sense of reality,"\textsuperscript{15} is a kind of feeling which is more akin to the emotions than to anything else. It is similar to what is called consent in James's psychology of volition.

It \textsuperscript{[belief]} resembles more than anything what in the psychology of volition we know as consent. Consent is recognized by all to be a manifestation of our active nature. It would naturally be described by such terms as 'willingness' or the 'turning of our disposition.' What characterizes both consent and belief is the cessation of theoretic agitation, through the advent of an idea which is inwardly stable, and fills the mind solidly to the exclusion of contradictory ideas. When this is the case, motor effects are apt to follow. Hence the states of consent and belief, characterized by repose on the purely intellectual side, are both intimately connected with subsequent practical activity.\textsuperscript{16}

In opposition to the Intellectualists, James claimed not only that will is involved in belief, but that will and belief are simply two names for the same psychological phenomenon. Both

\textsuperscript{14}James, "The Sentiment of Rationality," Essays on Faith and Morals, p. 90.

\textsuperscript{15}James, The Principles of Psychology, II, 283.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., pp. 283-84.
will and belief designate a certain relationship which the mind can have to those things upon which it focuses—a certain manner in which the mind attends to certain ideas. In the case of will and in the case of belief, a stable idea or object is present to the mind and commands its attention to the exclusion of all contradictory or incompatible representations. "All that the mind does is, in both cases [will and belief] the same; it looks at the object and consents to its existence, espouses it, says 'it shall be my reality.' It turns to it, in short, in the interested active emotional way."\textsuperscript{17}

The difference between will and belief lies in the fact that they deal with different classes of things. Will is concerned directly with things to be done or things to be made, and the things willed depend for their very existence upon the willing. "The objects, in the case of will, are those whose existence depends on our thought, movements of our own body for example, or facts which such movements executed in future may make real."\textsuperscript{18} For example, one wills to stand up; one wills to build a cabinet. The standing up and the bodily movements involved in building the cabinet are the direct outward effects of the will and depend for their reality upon the willing. The cabinet, which is the direct effect of the bodily movements and the indirect effect of the willing,

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 320. 
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
also depends for its reality as a cabinet upon the willing
insofar as the bodily movements are dependent upon the will.

In the case of belief, however, the thing believed to be
real does not in any way change in virtue of the belief alone.
If one believes that the moon is real, the moon itself is not
altered in any way by that fact.

Objects of belief, . . . are those which do not change
according as we think regarding them. I will to get
up early to-morrow morning; I believe that I got up
late yesterday morning; I will that my foreign book-
seller in Boston shall procure me a German book and
write to him to that effect. I believe that he will
make me pay three dollars for it when it comes, etc.
Now the important thing to notice is that this differ-
ence between the objects of will and belief is entirely
immaterial, as far as the relation of the mind to them
goes.\textsuperscript{19}

The relation of the mind to its object is the same in the case
of belief as it is in the case of will. In both instances, the
mind gives its attention to the object before it, to the ex-
clusion of all incompatible objects. However, man's physiolog-
ical constitution is such that when the object occupying the
mind without competition is the representation of a bodily
movement, the bodily movement inevitably follows (unless pre-
vented, of course, by external causes). And the bodily move-
ment is said to have been willed—rather than believed.

One must not think of the difference between will and
belief, however, as the difference between the practical and
the theoretical. On the contrary, action follows in some way
upon both of them. In the case of will, the action to be

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
performed is the thing willed and depends for its performance upon the willing; its performance is the direct effect of the willing. The action which follows upon belief, however, is not the direct effect of the belief. It is the direct effect of an act of will; but it can be said to follow from belief insofar as its being willed is a consequence of the belief. When we believe something, i.e., accept it as real, we are willing to act in regard to it. We are willing to vouch for the reality in which we believe with our lives and action. We do, in fact, act in some way upon each of our beliefs if only in the sense that a particular belief is one of the presuppositions of our day to day living or in the sense that the thing believed is, insofar as it is believed, a part of the world of which we take account in the active course of our lives.

Accepting William James's position regarding the inner nature of belief and its kinship with will, one must still consider the conditions of its production, i.e., the circumstances under which a person thinks things to be real. The things which present themselves to consciousness for acceptance as real are many and varied. Some belong to the world of sensible things, i.e., to the world of man's lived experience; others, such as atoms, molecules, electrons, and the like belong to the world of science. Although the latter world of "solids and fluids and their 'laws'"\(^{20}\) may be considered by the scientist to be more real than any other, the world of

\(^{20}\)Ibid., p. 292.
science is quite barren when compared to the life-world of human experience. Not only is the world of human life full of colors, sounds, odors, flavors, warmth, and the like for which the scientific world has no room except insofar as it deals with their causes; but it is rich with the human felt activities of perceiving, thinking, believing, willing, and loving, none of which are accessible as such to the measuring tools of science.

However, the items in the sensible world and the objects of science are not alone in their struggle to win the continual designations of 'reality.' There are still other candidates for the title. Some of them belong to the world of ideal relations—the propositions of logic, mathematics, and metaphysics, for example; others belong to the world of what James called "idols of the tribe." James borrowed the term "idols of the tribe," from Francis Bacon to refer to "illusions or prejudices common to the race"—the belief, for example, that the sky moves around the earth and other similar cosmological ideas.

All educated people recognize these ['idols of the tribe'] as forming one sub-universe. The motion of the sky round the earth, for example, belongs to this world. That motion is not a recognized item of any of the other worlds; but as an 'idol of the tribe' it really exists. For certain philosophers 'matter' exists only as an idol of the tribe. For science, the 'secondary qualities' of matter are but 'idols of the tribe.'

21 "The molecules and ether-waves of the scientific world, ... simply kick the object's warmth and color out, they refuse to have any relations with them." (Ibid., p. 293.)

22 Ibid., p. 292.
Also seeking recognition as real are the objects which belong to the various supernatural worlds of the different religions (the heaven and hell of Christian theology, for example), those which belong to the world of individual opinion, and, of course, the objects of sheer madness and insanity. In a certain sense, all of these things exist in some way. In one way or another, they are a part of someone's experience; they are either sensed, imagined, felt, or at least thought of. According to James, even objects of fancy, errors, hallucinations, and dreams are parts of a man's life—"undeniable features of the Universe." They have some kind of existence insofar as they are experienced phenomena even though they do not exist in the same way in which what James considers 'absolutely real' things exist. In the case of the individual mind to whom these phenomena appear, however, if any one of the phenomena, no matter how fanciful or illusory it may be, fills the mind and captures the attention to the exclusion of all contradictory and conflicting objects, it will be believed—unhesitatingly—it will while thus attended-to be real for that person.

23 Ibid., p. 291.

24 In using the term 'absolute,' James does not imply that there exists some reality which is completely independent of all others and has no relation whatsoever to anything else. He uses the term, however, when speaking of the fact that men review the objects that come before them, compare the objects with one another, and consider some more real than others. Those objects in comparison with which others are considered less real, or even unreal, James speaks of, on at least one occasion, as absolutely real.
Believing something means accepting it and giving one's attention to it to the exclusion of all its competitors.

... whatever excites and stimulates our interest is real; whenever an object so appeals to us that we turn to it, accept it, fill our mind with it, or practically take account of it, so far it is real for us, and we believe it. Whenever, on the contrary, we ignore it, fail to consider it or act upon it, despise it, reject it, forget it, so far it is unreal for us and disbelieved.

The things in which we believe do not necessarily occupy the center of our attention, however. They may be at the fringes of our consciousness; they may be part of the context in which we live and act; they may be among the many things which we take for granted in our daily living—the necessary presuppositions for our day-to-day activities. Whether the items believed occupy the center of our attention or are only at the fringes of consciousness, believing nevertheless involves attending to them in some way or other.

James pointed out that each thinker has dominant habits of attention—habits which are strongly influenced by his interests, needs, and desires and which "practically elect from among the various worlds [of items mentioned above] some one to be for him the world of ultimate realities." For most men, the things of sense hold this special position and constitute "the absolutely real world's nucleus." But


26 Ibid., p. 293.

27 Ibid., p. 294.
why? Why should the world of sense be counted more real than the world of science, or the world of abstract relations, or the supernatural world, or any of the others for that matter? According to James, this is due to the "everlasting partiality of our nature." To be real for us, to capture and hold our attention, a thing must be a practical item, one that appears both interesting and important to us, one that answers our emotional needs, our aesthetic needs, and our practical needs. And more than all the other things which present themselves to us—more than the objects of science, for example, more than the propositions of mathematics, logic, and metaphysics—sensible things fulfill this requirement.

Intellectualists, in their opposition to faith as having any importance in cognition, eliminate all that is personal from the valid motives of belief—the ideal in knowledge for them is complete objectivity. But James pointed out that the "fons et origo of all reality, whether from the absolute or the practical point of view, is . . . subjective, is ourselves." The following paragraphs will explain what James meant by this.

James held that the object of belief, namely real existence or reality, is different from any other predicate applied to a thing. All other predicates designate attributes or properties which in some way enrich the intrinsic content of

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., pp. 296-97.
an object and enhance our idea of it. But such is not the case with the predicate, 'existence.' Predicating existence of a thing leaves the content of the object inwardly the same, but in some way "fixes it and stamps it in to us." To predicate existence of something is to affirm that it is a part of our lives, i.e., a part of the life-world in which we are actively engaged.

As James pointed out, our own reality is the strongest certainty we have. Every moment of our experience is so pervaded with the sense of our own life that our own existence is indubitable. And it is only by becoming in some way related to this existence of ours that other things come to be accepted by us as real. We judge things to be real to the extent that they immediately affect our active lives or are related to things which do. We believe in them to the degree that they meet our personal needs, particularly our need to fulfill ourselves by meaningful action in the world, or are related to things which do meet these needs.  

Ibid., p. 296.

We believe that Alexander Graham Bell really existed, not because he has ever been an object of our immediate sensation or because his reality has ever directly stimulated our emotions or our volition, but because we have a 'dim sense of continuity' between Mr. Bell and his activities and our present world in which Mr. Bell's telephone plays an important part in our everyday affairs. The following is James's own example: "When I believe that some prehistoric savage chipped this flint, . . . the reality of the savage and of his act makes no direct appeal either to my sensation, emotion, or volition. What I mean by my belief in it is simply my dim sense of a continuity between the long dead savage and his doings and the present world of which the flint forms part." (The Principles of Psychology, II, 320.)
... our own reality, that sense of our own life which we at every moment possess, is the ultimate of ultimates for our belief. 'As sure as I exist!'—this is our uttermost warrant for the being of all other things. ... we all of us, feeling our own present reality with absolutely coercive force, ascribe an all but equal degree of reality, \(^3\) first to whatever things

\(^3\)On more than one occasion, James, implying that there are varying degrees of reality, spoke of some things being judged more real than others. "As a whole, sensations ... are judged more real than conceptions; things met with every hour more real than things seen once; attributes perceived when awake, more real than attributes perceived in a dream." \(\text{The Principles of Psychology, II, 300.}\) John Wild objects to James's reference to different degrees of reality. In Wild's opinion, James's use of such terms as 'more real' and 'less real' tends to obscure the sharp difference between a real thing and a delusion as two distinct modes of being. \(\text{John Wild, "William James and the Phenomenology of Belief," in New Essays in Phenomenology, p. 285.}\)

From James's radically empirical point of view, however, his use of such terminology in Chapter XXI of \text{The Principles of Psychology} (Vol. II) was completely justified. After all, it was not James's purpose to distinguish between modes of being on a non-empirical basis. He was not concerned with modes of being independent of the way in which they are experienced. James's chief concern was with what the reality or unreality of the things that come before the mind is known as in human experience. He was interested in what the reality of things means to us in experiential terms. And he tells us that reality means relation to our emotional and active lives. Things that do not affect our lives in any way are considered by us to be simply unreal, while things that do affect our emotional and active lives to any degree at all are counted as real. Things are related to our emotional and active lives in different ways, however. The relations which items in our experience have to our existence are more or less intimate; things influence our lives in varying degrees. Things which touch our lives only at the periphery of consciousness, for example, things which affect our actions to only a minimal degree, things of which we take account in our active lives with only a minimum of emotional involvement—these are all real for us to the extent that they touch our lives at all. But they do not have the same vibrant reality for us as do things which occupy the center of our consciousness or things which vitally affect our everyday existence or the persons with whom we are emotionally involved. The trees in our neighbor's yard, the pavement on which we walk, the engineer on the train that takes us on a vacation—these are all real for us. But they may not be as vibrantly real as the roses we cultivate
we lay hold on with a sense of personal need, and second, to whatever farther things continuously belong with these.33

We unhesitatingly believe in whatever things are intimately related to our own lives. But specifically, what are the particular intimate relations with our life which prompt us to accept a thing as real? "Any relation to our mind at all, in the absence of a stronger relation, suffices to make an object real,"34 James wrote. The barest appeal to our attention is sufficient for this if there is in our consciousness no other thing with which the present item fails to harmonize or with which it is incompatible. For example, the newborn mind of the infant will readily accept as real the very first impression that it encounters, for it has no basis in our own yard, the automobile we drive to work, the men and women we love. And of the roses, the automobile, and the people we love, the latter may be the more vividly real still because they exert a more profound influence upon our lives than the others. After all, it is to them that we are usually willing to commit ourselves most completely.

The fact that we are willing to commit ourselves more actively and more completely to some things in our experience than to others indicates that just as there are differing degrees of reality, there are also different intensities of belief. A man's belief in the automobile which he drives is certainly of a different quality than his belief in someone he loves. Indeed, his automobile may elicit from him an active response; but it does not normally elicit from him the same emotionally charged response evoked by someone he deeply loves. He needs his automobile, he uses it, he takes care of it. But he is not willing to lay down his life for it as he may be willing to do for a friend. Indeed, he believes in both his car and his friend; but his belief, experienced as his emotional and active response to them, is of a different quality and intensity in each case.

33 James, The Principles of Psychology, II, 297.
34 Ibid., p. 299.
for doing otherwise. At that point, the first impression is
the infant mind's only content. There are no other impressions
with which the first one can conflict or with which it can be
incompatible. It is thus spontaneously believed. "Any object
which remains uncontradicted [by the reality of something incom-
patible with it] is ipso facto believed and posited as absolute
reality." 35

In the case of an adult, however, every new item, every
possible reality, which presents itself to consciousness for
acceptance as actually real presents itself to a person who
lives in a world already furnished with actual realities, i.e.,
with things which, because of their intimate relation to his
life, have already been accepted by him as real. If the new
candidate for actual existence is to become a part of this
real world, it must fit in with the realities already there.
If it does not harmonize with them, if it is somehow incom-
patible with one or more items in a man's real lived-in world,
then the man must decide between it, the possible reality, and
the things already there with which it conflicts.

Whether the new item gains admittance to his real world
or the old ones remain entrenched depends upon their relative
power to hold the person's attention and especially upon their
power to elicit from him an active response. For, as James
tells us, to believe something, i.e., to accept it as real,
means to be ready and willing to act in regard to it, or at

least to take it into account in our active lives. Now the items in our experience which most easily hold our attention and most readily stimulate us to action are those which most excite our emotional interest. Thus James says, "... *reality means simply relation to our emotional and active life.*" But the things which have easiest access to our emotional and active lives are those which are the most vivid, i.e., the most sensibly pungent especially by way of arousing pleasure or pain, and those which are the most persistent. Sensible things are more likely to be accepted as real than merely conceptual things; and the world which surrounds us in our waking hours is more likely to be believed, because of its persistence, than the relatively fleeting world of our dreams; and in the sensible world of our waking hours those things which are productive of pleasure or pain are more belief-compelling than those which are not. Thus James asserts that sensible vividness and persistence are the two qualities in things which more than any other prompt us to give them reality and accept them as part of the world in which we are actively engaged.

Sensible vividness or pungency is then the vital factor in reality when once the conflict between objects, and the connecting of them together in the mind, has begun. No object which neither possesses this vividness in its own right nor is able to borrow it from anything else has a chance of making headway against vivid rivals, or of rousing in us that reaction in which belief consists.  

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James indicates, however, that things which are not themselves sensed but which are merely conceived may elicit from us an active response and in some instances be counted just as real as sensible items. These things may 'borrow' a certain vividness from sensible things to which they are related and may be accepted as real because of this relationship. "Conceived molecular vibrations, e.g., are by the physicist judged more real than felt warmth, because so intimately related to all those other facts of motion in the world which he has made his special study." On the other hand, a conceptual item may elicit from us an active response because of its powerful effect upon our emotions. An idea which arouses our fears, allays our anxieties, promises the fulfillment of our hopes, or fills us with awe can sometimes be as belief-compelling as a sensible item of our experience. So powerful is the influence of emotion upon belief, an influence which is due to the bodily sensations involved, that James wrote:

The greatest proof that a man is sui compos is his ability to suspend belief in presence of an emotionally exciting idea. To give this power is the highest result of education. In untutored minds the power does not exist. Every exciting thought in the natural man carries credence with it. To conceive with passion is eo ipso to affirm.

For most men, however, sensible objects are either their realities or the tests of their realities. They posit as the unquestionably real world the realm of sense experience and

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38 Ibid., pp. 300-301.
39 Ibid., p. 308.
demand that all our concepts or conceptual theories be verified by, or at least lead us back to, the world of sensible things. "What science means by 'verification' is no more than this, that no object of conception shall be believed which sooner or later has not some permanent and vivid object of sensation for its term." This success with which sensible things gain access to the world we accept as unquestionably real is due to their stimulating effect upon our emotions and active powers.

Our requirements in the way of reality terminate in our own acts and emotions, our own pleasures and pains. These are the ultimate fixities from which, . . . the whole chain of our beliefs depends, object hanging to object, as the bees, in swarming, hang to each other until, de proche en proche, the supporting branch, the Self, is reached and held.

It is interesting to note that those Intellectualists of a positivistic bent who insist that beliefs are rendered objectively valid only when verified in terms of sense experience feel that this norm takes the subjective element out of belief and renders it completely objective and totally untainted by subjective interests. James held, however, that the very postulation of the sensible world as the real world and as the testing ground for the truth of all beliefs is itself the result of subjective interest. Indeed, to take the personal element out of belief is contradictory.

William James praised Josiah Royce's explanation of man's

40 Ibid., p. 301.
41 Ibid., p. 311.
belief in an external world in the latter's Religious Aspect of Philosophy. "Chapters IX and X of Prof. Royce's work," James wrote, "are on the whole the clearest account of the psychology of belief with which I am acquainted." According to Royce, if one were to ask a man what he means by the external world, an honest answer would be: "I mean by the external world in the first place something that I accept or demand, that I posit, postulate, actively construct on the basis of sense-data." In the opinion of Royce, man believes in an external world because he wants one.

The ultimate motive with the man of every-day life is the will to have an external world. Whatever consciousness contains, reason will persist in spontaneously adding the thought: 'But there shall be something beyond this.' . . . The popular assurance of an external world is the fixed determination to make one, now and henceforth.

When it is a question of the reality of comparatively simple objects—objects of perception and imagination and relatively simple conceptual objects—man believes in whatever has intimate and continuous practical relations with himself. But when it comes to a more complex conceptual system such as a philosophical system—a conceptual scheme designed to embrace and in some way explain the whole universe—the motives for belief at first glance may not be too obvious. But even in

42 Ibid., p. 318.
44 Ibid., p. 318.
this case, the deciding vote is cast by man's volitional nature in the interest of his aesthetic, emotional and practical needs.

Not only do our needs determine which of several possible philosophical explanations of the universe we are willing to accept, but our very search for such a conceptual system to explain the world is itself the result of need. We need an overall view of things; we need to understand as much of the world as we can in order to know how to act in it.

James suggested that it is man's craving for rationality that prompts him to try to explain the universe philosophically. Philosophers philosophize, he said, because they "desire to attain a conception of the frame of things which shall on the whole be more rational than that somewhat chaotic view which every one by nature carries about with him under his hat." 45

As we shall discover in the following pages, however, the demands of rationality are not merely theoretical as they are often thought to be. They are practical as well. It is true that in searching for rationality we are indeed looking for a felicitous and comparatively easy way of mentally handling the manifold data of sense experience.

The facts of the world in their sensible diversity are always before us, but our theoretic need is that they should be conceived in a way that reduces their manifoldness to simplicity. . . . The simplified result is handled with far less mental effort than the original data; and a philosophic conception of nature is thus in no metaphorical sense a labor-saving contrivance.46

46Ibid., p. 65.
The rationality that we need, however, involves much more than merely ease of mental function. It involves more importantly the relative ease, effectiveness, and significance of our external activity as well. The rationality that we seek is one that will not only render our conceptual handling of the world easy and mentally satisfying but also render our active handling of it felicitous and fruitful. We seek a rationality that will make our active relations with the world effective and fulfilling—fulfilling in relation to our own development and that of the world itself.

In James’s view, the need for rationality can be described as the need to feel at home in the world. But feeling at home in the world means more than merely understanding the world. It also means feeling that one’s life and actions have meaning and relevance to the world’s fulfillment. It means feeling that by one’s actions one can help to shape the course of the universe and contribute to its perfection. It is this need for rationality which prompts man to philosophize in the first place; and when he comes to accept or reject a particular philosophical explanation of the world, his acceptance or rejection of it will be on the basis of its rationality or lack of it.

The rationality of a conceptual system is generally held to be that characteristic which more than any other ought commend the theory to a man’s belief. Of any two conceptual theories offered for consideration, it is usually conceded that a man will accept, or at least that he ought to accept,
the one which is the more rational. But although it is agreed that men ought to believe what is rational in preference to what is irrational, there is no universal agreement about what constitutes rationality. According to one view, a conceptual theory is rational if it is consistent, i.e., if it contains no contradictions, and if the reasoning which went into its development was in accordance with the rules of formal logic. In this view, any theory which is logically inconsistent is of course non-rational. Allowing for some variations, rationality, in philosophical circles at least, generally means conformity to reason and harmony with logical principles. But for William James, rationality involves more than mere conformity to reason. For James, it is not simply man's reason which decides an issue; it is not merely his intellect which believes or disbelieves. Belief is an act of the whole man, and to be worthy of belief, a theory must be in harmony with the whole person. Thus for James, rationality, considered as an attribute of a conceptual scheme, means not merely conformity with reason but, more importantly, conformity with man and his experience.

Whatever professional philosophers may say about rationality or about William James's notion of rationality, if one analyzes the way in which the man on the street judges the reasonableness of an idea, one finds that the ordinary man considers that idea the most reasonable which best answers to all of a man's needs and requirements—not just to the requirements of the intellect. In fact, the ordinary man on the street may not even know the rules of formal logic. Neverthe-
less he does not hesitate to make judgments about the reasonableness of things, because while he may lack knowledge about the formal rules of thought, he has within himself, and in a sense is himself, the standard of rationality.

William James tells us that we judge the reasonableness of an idea or of a system of ideas by certain effects which it has on us. Whatever we are able to think about without difficulty seems to us reasonable. "As soon, . . . as we are enabled from any cause whatever to think with perfect fluency, the thing we think of seems to us pro tanto rational."47 When our thinking about something is accompanied by strong feelings of ease, peace, and rest, we feel that the thing we are thinking about is reasonable. "This feeling of the sufficiency of the present moment, of its absoluteness,—this absence of all need to explain it, account for it, or justify it,—is what I call the Sentiment of Rationality."48

What is the source of this feeling of rationality in our thinking? What characteristics must a theory itself have in order for a man to be able to think about it with such freedom and ease that it will be rational? In the view of some, the requirements of rationality are purely theoretical. From James's point of view, however, the requirements of rationality, as indicated above, are practical as well as theoretical. In fact, a perfect rationality that is purely theoretical is (for

47 Ibid., p. 64.
48 Ibid.
most people) impossible in James's opinion.

Elaborating on this point, James said that a man's philosophic attitude is determined by two intellectual cravings and by the degree to which one balances the other. These two desires are 1) the passion for simplicity and economy in thought (the distinctively philosophical passion) and 2) the passion for clearness. The passion for clearness demands detail, integrity of perception, and faithfulness to facts and shuns any abstract way of conceiving things which, while simplifying them, might obscure their differences. James felt that a perfect theoretical rationality demands the complete satisfaction of the distinctively philosophical craving for simplicity. This urge to simplify things and to explain them in the most parsimonious manner has driven philosophers to posit greater and greater unity in reality. But the unity which they have succeeded in achieving in their conceptual schemes has been attained in most cases by classifying things according to their similarities and ignoring their differences. Obviously, such classifications, being necessarily abstract, are distasteful to those philosophers in whom the passion for clearness predominates, for abstractness and clarity are inversely related. Moreover, they cannot satisfy fully even the passion for simplicity. In the process of classification, those attributes which cannot be identified with the nature considered common to the members of a given class are omitted. However, while they are left out of consideration as far as the classification itself is concerned, they nevertheless remain
on the scene empirically associated with the common nature but at the same time lacking all rational relation to it. For this reason, James claimed that all efforts to achieve perfect theoretical rationality, i.e., rationally to account for everything in this manner, are doomed to failure. For there is always something left outstanding and perfect unity is never accomplished.

In "The Sentiment of Rationality," however, James asked his readers to suppose that such perfect unification could be achieved. Suppose that a single concept could be formed under which all things could in some way be subsumed. Suppose that all things could be unified as parts, aspects, or instances of a single datum which left nothing out. Would not such a concept, such a datum, satisfy the craving for unity completely and be considered rational in itself? Would not such a philosophical view be characterized by a perfect theoretical rationality? Would it not seem that with no "otherness being left to annoy us, we should sit down at peace"?\textsuperscript{49} Not according to William James, for man is so accustomed to seeing an 'other' beside every datum in his experience that if an absolute all-embracing datum were presented to him, he would persist in looking around for some 'other' with which to contrast it. He would begin to think of non-being itself as an 'other' opposed to the Absolute presented to him. He would puzzle over how to bridge the gap between the 'two'--between being

\textsuperscript{49}Ibid., p. 71.
and non-being. He would ask, "Why is there something rather than nothing? Why this world rather than another?" Even in the most unified philosophical system, according to James, the mystery of reality always remains. "Absolute existence is absolute mystery, for its relations with the nothing remain unmediated to our understanding." 50 "The bottom of being is left logically opaque to us, as something which we simply come upon and find, and about which (if we wish to act) we should pause and wonder as little as possible." 51

For James, then, a perfect rationality achieved logically and theoretically is impossible. Rationality means unimpeded mental function. But in the purely speculative realm, even if all other impediments are successfully by-passed, man's mind will eventually bump into the inevitable question 'Why?' when it comes to being. James, however, felt that impediments inescapable in the theoretical realm might be avoided, if man's mind were to leave the theoretical order and look to the practical sphere for the final word on rationality. A philosophical theory which might fail to satisfy perfectly the mind's craving for simplicity and unity and thus fail to appear perfectly rational from a purely theoretical point of view, may nevertheless provide a man with a feeling of rationality because of the theory's consonance with his active nature—because of its ability to awaken his active impulses and to

50 Ibid., p. 72.
51 Ibid., p. 73.
satisfy his aesthetic and emotional needs.

From James's point of view, the human mind is triadic in structure, being capable 1) of receiving impressions, 2) of conceptualizing, reflecting, and reasoning, and 3) of reacting. Accordingly, James spoke, somewhat figuratively, of three "departments" of man's nature: a "feeling department," a "conceiving department," and a "willing department." The "feeling department" and the "conceiving department," he said, are both subordinate to the "willing department." Sensory impression occurs for the sake of reflection; and reflection in turn occurs for the sake of action. As James expressed it, "perception and thinking are only there for behavior's sake." The conceiving and reasoning powers of the human mind function for the sake of ends which are set up for them by man's passion and volitional powers, in the sense that the very purpose of thought is to enable man to get along in the world and to fulfill his aesthetic, emotional, and practical needs. Man's "volitional nature," James said somewhat ambiguously, supplies the very motives for thinking. But more than this, it has the last word to say about the conclusions arrived at by man's thought.

James held that in order for any theory, simple or complex,
to be felt as rational, it must satisfy the demands of all three aspects of man's nature. To satisfy the "feeling department," it must be at least in harmony with all the data of sense experience; to satisfy the reflective part of man, it must be logically self-consistent. But even if a theory should pass these first two tests, if it fails to provide man's fundamental active and emotional powers with adequate objects outside of themselves on which to react, a man's "volitional nature" will reject it. It will not feel rational. Thus, action is the final arbiter.

Let us take as an example a man's choice of a philosophical system. Intellectualists would have us believe that only two factors influence a man's choice in this regard—empirical data and logical consistency. Furthermore, they would have us believe that it is not a matter of choice at all, but that a valid philosophical outlook is simply a question of the intellect's recognizing what experience and logic make evident. For William James, however, adopting a philosophical attitude is a truly human choice in the fullest sense of the term. Philosophy is certainly more than the mere mental reproduction of sensed data in an orderly fashion. No mere assemblage of concepts representing perceptual facts, however logical and complete, deserves the name of a philosophical system. Genuine philosophy strives to interpret the data of sense in terms of causes, meanings, and values; and its interpretative function carries it far beyond the purely perceptual range into areas where sense and reason alone are not competent
to decide the issues.

It is in fact possible for two diverse philosophical sys-
tems to be equally in harmony with the sensible data supplied
by man's perceptive faculties and equally consistent from the
point of view of logic. In such a case, why does a man accept
one and not the other? Certainly not because sense and reason
verify one and falsify the other. As James clearly indicated,
a man accepts a given philosophical system because he chooses
to do so. And how does he make his choice? James pointed out
that a man chooses from among the alternative philosophies
presented to him that system which, because it best satisfies
the demands of his active nature, seems the most rational to
him. But what are the demands of man's active nature--the
needs which a philosophical conception must satisfy in order
to be deemed rational?

First of all, in order to satisfy the requirements of the
"willing department" of man's nature, a philosophical theory
"must, in a general way at least, banish uncertainty from the
future." It must in a general way tell a man what to expect,
for uncertainty regarding the future is a mental irritant and
breeds uneasiness. James did not mean to suggest that a phil-
osophical theory can tell a man precisely what to expect at
every moment of his life. On the contrary, since experience
is ever changing, since no moment in experience ever exactly
duplicates another, every moment of our existence is tinged

55James, "The Sentiment of Rationality," Essays on Faith
and Morals, p. 77.
with the novel and the unexpected. However, while a philosophy cannot foretell every future detail of experience, it can so describe its ultimate principle as "to define expectancy." If, for example, a philosophy describes its ultimate datum in terms of goodness, perfection, or reason, "we may set our minds at rest in a general way, . . . by the reflection that whatever is in store for us can never at bottom be inconsistent with the character of this term." In such a case, "our attitude even toward the unexpected is in a general sense defined."

Secondly, a philosophical theory must define the future "congruously with our spontaneous powers." It need not be a completely optimistic philosophy; but on the other hand, it cannot be totally pessimistic in the sense of offering no hope at all for the fulfillment of man's cherished dreams. To be acceptable, a philosophy must present man with a world in which he can exercise his distinctively creative powers—a world which is open and to some degree plastic in his hands, a world upon which he can leave his mark for better or worse, a world in which he can make a uniquely personal contribution. Only a philosophy which presents man with a universe that is incomplete, unfinished, and susceptible to change, a universe

56 Ibid., p. 79.
57 Ibid., p. 80.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., p. 82.
that depends on man's commitment and active contribution for its fulfillment, can satisfy the practical requirements of rationality. A theory which describes the world as closed, as already finished, or as completely determined independently of all human activity has the paralyzing effect of depriving man of all motives for action. Such a philosophy renders his active powers, indeed his very life, meaningless and absurd. As James put it, an acceptable philosophy must give a man a universe for which his "emotions and active propensities shall be a match," and in which the ideals which he admires, loves, and works to attain are at least real possibilities.

It is true, of course, that men's active impulses differ and that a philosophy which suits one man may not suit another. However, there are certain active propensities which are common to most men—the need to use one's powers in the accomplishment of worthwhile goals, for example, the need to feel that one's life has meaning, significance and relevance in the whole scheme of things. But, according to James, there is one tendency in most men that many philosophers overlook and others try "to huddle out of sight." And that is the tendency to believe beyond the evidence—the aptitude for faith. "In the average man, . . . the power to trust, to risk a little beyond the literal evidence, is an essential function." Just as a

60 Ibid., p. 84.
61 Ibid., p. 90.
62 Ibid., p. 91.
little risk adds relish to a man's active undertakings, so too a touch of uncertainty in his philosophic creed, enough to allow a man an opportunity to play his hunches and to indulge his faith-tendencies, adds gusto to his speculative undertakings as well.

A philosophy such as monism which posits a deterministic universe that is finished and complete with nothing left to be accomplished by man's efforts, with no truth left to be discovered by experimentation, trial and error, leaps in the dark—such a philosophy takes the zest out of living. A philosophic view of the world which leaves no room for faith or risk, a world formula which denies to man the opportunity for adventure of a speculative and theoretical sort, as well as of an active kind, will never satisfy all of man's active propensities. It will not be in harmony with the full man and will not seem rational.

The ultimate philosophy, . . . must not be too strait-laced in form, must not in all its parts divide heresy from orthodoxy by too sharp a line. There must be left over and above the propositions to be subscribed, ubique, semper, et ab omnibus, another realm into which the stifled soul may escape from pedantic scruples and indulge its own faith at its own risks; and all that can here be done will be to mark out distinctly the questions which fall within faith's sphere.

Thus, in the opinion of William James, man's volitional nature, the Intellectualists' objections notwithstanding, has a vital role to play in determining man's beliefs—whether the objects of his beliefs be relatively simple or as complex as

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63 Ibid., p. 110.
a whole philosophical system. In James's opinion, man's active nature will not sanction any philosophical view which denies man the right to gamble a little, to act when the results are not guaranteed in advance, to believe beyond the evidence. Man's active nature will not approve a world picture in which faith is left out because not only is it an empirical fact that men do live by faith to a greater or less degree, but it is also a fact that faith is necessary for human life. A prohibition upon faith is a prohibition upon human fulfillment, indeed a prohibition upon the fulfillment of the universe. The perfection of human life, as well as the progress, development, and perfection of the open world in which man lives, depends upon man's commitment and creative action. But action presupposes conviction; and sense and reason alone are notoriously inept at providing a solid basis for conviction except in very limited situations. Thus, faith is not only a fact which philosophy cannot overlook but it is a necessity for that fruitful human action which is man's only means of fulfilling himself and the world.

Because faith—indeed all belief—includes the will, believing, generally speaking, is a moral act according to James. A man's beliefs are things for which he is responsible. Since belief and will are but two names for the same psychological phenomenon, what is true of will is, for the most part, true of belief. Thus if will is free, as James held, then belief is free also or at least it can be free.

Obviously, James did not hold that every act of belief is
a free responsible act anymore than he would be able to say that every process of volition is a deliberate and responsible one. One apparent obstacle to considering belief a free moral act at all is James's defining it in a manner that makes a man's emotional reactions such influential determining factors. Belief is an act of the whole man, not simply of his intellect and not merely of his will in the narrow sense of the term, but an act involving the whole person—intellect, will, emotions and so forth. But some would say, "We cannot control our emotions. How then can we believe at will, how can our beliefs be free and responsible?" James would reply that it is true that a man may not be able to believe at will abruptly. Nature sometimes produces in us instantaneous beliefs by suddenly putting us in a vitally active connection with objects in which we previously had no interest, objects for which we previously had no feeling. Such instantaneous beliefs, of course, are not achieved by any effort of the will. But, said James, gradually our wills can, by dint of effort, lead us to the same results by a very simple method:

we need only in cold blood ACT as if the thing in question were real, and keep acting as if it were real, and it will infallibly end by growing into such a connection with our life that it will become real. It will become so knit with habit and emotion that our interests in it will be those which characterize belief. Those to whom 'God' and 'Duty' are now mere names can make them much more than that, if they make a little sacrifice to them every day.64

Thus we can, by an effort of our will, freely believe.

The line between faith and the believer which is not called faith is not as sharp in James's philosophy as it may appear to be. There is a sense in which almost all belief, even that which is said to be based upon conclusive evidence, participates in faith. James described faith as believing when it is still theoretically possible to doubt. But in James's view, except for the immediate data of the present moment and except for those self-evident propositions which concern only the relations of abstract concepts with one another (the principles of identity and contradiction, for example), it is always theoretically possible to doubt our judgments. Now, the evidence may be so strong that it would be foolish to do so, but it is still possible to do so. There is more than one reason for this. The changing character of reality, for one thing, makes it always possible to question the perfect applicability of a judgment made about an object yesterday to that same object today. But another source of possible doubt concerns not the object so much as the knower. Every knower sees an object from his own peculiar point of view. And almost every knower can recall occasions when after adopting one posture, he found it necessary to adopt a different one. Such experiences make one aware of the possibility of error.

According to James, every representation per se is believed, while it persists, to be of something absolutely so. It becomes relative and dubitable only when 'reduced' in the light of further consideration—only when one confronts it with other data which can render it questionable. In James's
words, "the reductive of most of our confident beliefs about Being is the reflection that they are our beliefs; that we are turbid media; and that a form of being may exist uncontaminated by the touch of the fallacious knowing subject." 65

Thus, beyond the assurance of the immediate present, doubt is always possible in regard to our judgments about matters of fact. 66 Skepticism can always have the final word because after every definition that we make of an object, "reflection may arise, infect it with the cogito, and so discriminate it from the object in se." 67 That we do not allow

65 James, "Lewes's 'Problems of Life and Mind,'" Collected Essays and Reviews, pp. 5-6.

66 Although it may not be vitally important in purely speculative matters, doubt arises as a critical issue in practical affairs because of its paralyzing effect upon our active powers. As James's friend, Charles Peirce, pointed out, most frequently "doubts arise from some indecision, however momentary, in our action." ("How to Make Our Ideas Clear," Philosophical Writings of Peirce, p. 27.) "It is certainly best for us," Peirce wrote, "that our beliefs should be such as may truly guide our actions so as to satisfy our desires; and this reflection will make us reject every belief which does not seem to have been so formed as to insure this result. But it will only do so by creating a doubt in the place of that belief." ("The Fixation of Belief," Philosophical Writings of Peirce, p. 10.)

67 James, "Lewes's 'Problems of Life and Mind,'" Collected Essays and Reviews, p. 10. The term 'in se' in the above quotation is but one example of James's frequent use of terms with a scholastic flavor. Throughout James's writings, one finds terms such as 'essence' and 'nature' and such Latin phrases as 'in se' and 'per se.' Of course in James's works, these terms do not have precisely the same connotations which they have in the writings of medieval philosophers and later scholastic authors. 'Essence' and 'nature,' for example, do not have the overtones of permanence and immutability which they often have in scholastic texts. The reader must be careful, therefore, not to attribute to James a scholastic perspective which would be more rationalistic than empiricist. James wanted to develop a philosophy of experience, and he did
skepticism to have the last word is due to the fact that most of us, realizing the futility of searching for absolute certitude and the intellectual stagnation and moral paralysis which are the normal accompaniments of unbridled skepticism, assume some things for true and act upon them.

Insofar as the bare possibility of doubt is present, every belief, from James's point of view, has an element of faith in it. At least every belief presupposes some previous act of faith in the sense that even our most assured convictions presuppose our belief in the very possibility of the human mind's ability to attain truth—a belief which can neither be empirically verified nor logically demonstrated. Such presuppositions, accepted without proof, may rarely be in the foreground of consciousness. But they are at the fringes of consciousness, making up the context of our day to day activities and providing the foundation for our most confident convictions.

Thus it is clear that the distinction between faith and the rest of belief is based not so much on the possibility of doubt as it is upon the presence or absence of conclusive evidence. When conclusive evidence is lacking, then one's belief is called faith.

not intend his language to convey more than the flux of experience could yield. Much confusion would have been avoided, of course, had James invented a new vocabulary for his purpose. But a man can do only so much in a lifetime. Developing a new philosophy was a monumental task in itself, and the limitations of time and the human condition made it necessary for James to use the vocabulary already at hand and to give new meanings to the old words.
But whether conclusive evidence is present or not, because of the influence of the will upon belief, man's beliefs belong to his moral life. He is responsible for them. And while it is possible for him to believe almost anything he would like to believe and, on the other hand, to doubt almost anything he wishes to doubt, a\ la Descartes, there are times when it is wiser to believe than to doubt and other times when it is wiser to doubt than to believe. From the point of view of James, however, there can be no question about the fact that man has a natural right to believe even when the evidence is less than coercive. There can be no doubt that faith is both permissible and a practical necessity for meaningful human existence. What must be determined then, according to James, is not the legitimacy of faith as such but rather those spheres of belief and action in which faith is the most appropriate mental attitude to adopt.
CHAPTER IV

FAITH AND HUMAN LIFE

William James held that, whether men are willing to admit the fact or not, they all live by faith. It is our purpose in this chapter to consider what faith is, how it differs from man's other beliefs, and the conditions under which it is justified and even necessary. We will not consider in any detail the specific motives which may prompt a particular individual to adopt one belief rather than another when the evidence is less than coercive, nor will we attempt to judge the relative merits of one particular faith as opposed to another. However, we will attempt to show that there are certain areas in which faith is the most appropriate and fruitful mental attitude to adopt; that faith is a necessity for thought, action, and human fulfillment; and furthermore that it has a vital role to play in the destiny of the universe as a whole. Although James's special concern was the justification of religious faith, the vastness of the topic precludes our discussing religious belief to any extent here. However, we will examine it in depth in Chapters V and VI.

As we saw in Chapter III, every belief, whether it can be called faith or not, involves the whole man. It is not merely an intellectual apprehension of something, but it is an active
espousal of that thing as real. It is an espousal which carries with it a willingness to stake one's person upon the object's reality. Belief involves not merely man's 'head' but also his 'heart.' James felt that these work together in determining a man's convictions, and he could not understand the gulf which some men put between them. "I can understand now no more than ever," he wrote to his father, "the world wide gulf you put between 'Head' and 'Heart'; to me they are inextricably entangled together. . . ."¹ As we have seen, no act of belief occurs, according to James, that does not in some way involve man's volitional and passional nature. As a matter of fact, will and belief are, from a psychological point of view, the same, insofar as in each case the relation between the mind and its object is identical. In will as in belief, the mind gives its attention to the item before it to the exclusion of all items incompatible with it. Will and belief differ, however, in their objects, in the sense that the object of will depends for its very existence upon the willing, while the object of belief is not directly dependent for its existence upon the believing.

The influence of man's passional nature upon belief becomes apparent when we analyze why a person believes one hypothesis rather than another. We find that there is no evidence of any human belief that does not, in at least a very minimal sense, involve preference and subjective interest of some kind.

¹Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, II, 705.
Even a belief in something as seemingly indubitable as the principle of contradiction involves personal interest. For one's belief in the principle of contradiction not only presupposes his believing in truth and in the human mind's ability to attain it but also involves his believing in the relevance of the principle itself to his future experience. And from James's point of view, these latter beliefs are the result of personal preference. We believe in truth and in the possibility of acquiring it, James said, because we want to have a truth and want to think it accessible to us.

Our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth, and that our minds and it are made for each other,—what is it but a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs us up? We want to have a truth; we want to believe that our experiments and studies and discussions must put us in a continually better and better position towards it; and on this line we agree to fight out our thinking lives. But if a pyrrhonistic sceptic asks us how we know all this, can our logic find a reply? No! certainly it cannot. It is just one volition against another,—we willing to go in for life upon a trust or assumption which he, for his part, does not care to make.2

Similarly, a person is inclined to believe in the universal significance of the principle of contradiction because he wants the kind of stable and predictable world which the principle of contradiction seems to guarantee. Even in those judgments which seem to be the most unimpassioned and objec-

tive, man's entire being participates; his intellect, will, desires, and emotions cooperate to various degrees. Contrary to the Intellectualists' view, therefore, every belief to some extent involves non-cognitive elements; for every belief is psychologically the same as an act of will and every belief presupposes some degree of personal interest.

The Intellectualists' disavowal of faith on the grounds that it involves non-cognitive elements is not entirely to the point. James suggested that man's full and active nature is involved in all belief; hence, the difference between faith and the rest of man's convictions cannot be the presence or absence of a non-cognitive factor. The difference is in the quality of the evidence in response to which a man accepts an object as real. The difference is in the degree of probability involved. In some cases, the evidence is so overwhelmingly coercive that a man believes without question. Either there is no evidence which conflicts with the proposed hypothesis and it does not occur to a man to doubt at all; or the evidence in favor of an hypothesis so outweighs any opposing data that he dismisses the possibility of doubting as ridiculous. His unhesitating belief in such instances is not normally called faith. However, whenever the evidence in support of an hypothesis is less than conclusive, whether it be minimal or more or less persuasive, then the belief, i.e., the assent to the reality or truth of the hypothesis, is considered to be an act of faith.
In instances of this sort, however, instances in which there is a lack of compelling evidence, the Intellectualists counsel us not to believe. They tell us to suspend judgment, for to believe what has not been logically demonstrated or empirically verified is, from their point of view, irrational and unscientific. Intellectualists bid us avoid error at all cost and prohibit faith as involving an unwarranted risk—the risk of making a mistake. They enjoin us to refuse to believe anything concerning which evidence has not yet come in and never to allow our preferences, emotions or desires to move us to believe anything which has not been logically or empirically verified.

William James himself, however, did not take the Intellectualists' advice too seriously. As he pointed out, to a greater or less degree, everyone, even the Intellectualist, habitually lives by faith of one kind of another. When a man crosses a bridge, for example, he has no proof that the bridge will not collapse under him; but he believes that it will support him. His belief is faith. When a man plans to accomplish a particular task tomorrow, he has no guarantee that the world will have a tomorrow, or that he himself will be here even if tomorrow does come for the rest of the world. But he believes that the sun will rise again as usual and that he himself will wake again to do the work of another day. His belief is faith. The latter example points up the fact that the temporality of our experience requires the exercise of faith in the day to day conduct of our lives. Human living, after all, is, to a
great extent, a series of choices and actions. It is a series of actions willed and actions performed. We will to do things and then we do them; our living thus involves a continual projection of ourselves into the future—into a future that is in no sense guaranteed. We have no proof that the future will come at all, although it always has come for us in the past; and if it does come, we do not know in advance what its character will be, although we have certain expectations in this regard. We live by continually projecting ourselves into a future that we take on faith.

This attitude of faith, which is in some sense common to all men, is not something merely to be tolerated as an unavoidable evil. It is, under the proper circumstances, totally justified and at times indispensable. There are cases in which, in spite of a lack of evidence, a decision must be made either because action is required or because a valuable truth or good may be lost if we do not decide. For example, a young man just graduated from school must decide what to do with his life whether for a short period of time or for a longer one. Although he has no absolute guarantee that one way of living will prove more happy and successful than another, in this instance action of some kind is required and a choice must be made. There are other cases, of course, in which immediate action is not required. But in some of these instances at least, although a decision is not a strict necessity, a suspension of judgment, a failure to decide, entails the loss of a valuable good. For example, it is an hypothesis of religion
that belief in God entails tremendous benefits for the believer in this life as well as after death. To suspend judgment in regard to the question of God is, of course, theoretically possible. But to do so amounts to forfeiting the benefits held to be consequent upon one's belief in Him. In a case like this, James said, man's passionate nature not only may but must determine his decision, because in fact the consequences of suspending judgment are equivalent to disbelieving.

James recognized the importance of considering whatever evidence is available in forming one's beliefs. But realizing the inability of intellectual considerations alone to settle not only the practical questions of daily living but also the larger philosophical issues about life, he saw the overriding importance of non-cognitive factors in determining human convictions. In James's words: "Our passionate nature not only may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, 'Do not decide, but leave the question open,' is itself a passionate decision,--just like deciding yes or no,--and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth." 3

James was not advocating a careless attitude regarding the truth. He was not suggesting that a man under any and all circumstances may believe whatever he wants to believe without discrimination. James was careful to spell out the

3 Ibid., p. 42.
conditions which would render faith lawful and necessary. His contention was that faith is lawful and indispensable when the option to be decided is a genuine option which cannot be decided on intellectual grounds, i.e., a genuine option with insufficient evidence to support either of the hypotheses involved. What did James mean by the key phrase, 'genuine option'? One can describe an option as a decision to be made between any two hypotheses, theoretical or practical, proposed to one's belief or as a decision to believe or not to believe a given hypothesis. In order for an option to be genuine, however, it must have certain characteristics; it must, James said, be living, momentous, and forced.

An option is living, according to James, if the hypotheses involved are alive. To be alive, an hypothesis must be seen as a real possibility by the person to whom the option is proposed. It must be seen as something upon which that person could act—something upon which he would be willing to act if he accepted it. It must be an hypothesis, the truth or falsity of which would make a difference in his active life. If an hypothesis has no bearing at all on a person's way of living, then for all practical purposes, it is dead for him. Obviously, liveliness signifies a relation which an hypothesis may have to an individual thinker, and a given hypothesis may be alive to one person but dead to another. What has made it alive or dead for someone in the first place, however, may very well have been his own passional nature. As James pointed out in regard to hypotheses which are already dead for us,
what has made them dead for us is for the most part a previous action of our willing nature of an antagonistic kind. When I say 'willing nature,' I do not mean only such deliberate volitions as may have set up habits of belief that we cannot now escape from, --I mean all such factors of belief as fear and hope, prejudice and passion, imitation and partisanship, the circumpressure of our caste and set.  

It is as though every new hypothesis proposed for our belief must pass before a reviewing board constituted by all of our past experience, feelings, desires, emotions, active inclinations, prejudices, and opinions--opinions which may be original with us, opinions inherited from our ancestors, as well as opinions espoused because of their current popularity or prestige. Any new hypothesis proposed to us will either be congenial with, i.e., in harmony with, the members of this reviewing board or not. If it is congenial, we will see it as alive, i.e., as having a bearing upon our active existence. If not, it will be dead for us and incapable of affecting our lives in any way. Here again we see the practical impossibility of totally extricating human convictions from all personal influences. As objective as one tries to be, one cannot see reality except from the perspective of the particular vantage point which he occupies in history and in the unique light of his own experience, education, social involvement, and personal inclinations.

Granted that an option is living, however, faith is necessary only if the option is also momentous and forced. It is momentous, James said, if what is at stake is vitally signifi-

cant, if the opportunity presented by the option is unique, or if the decision, once made, is not reversible. Obviously, from James's point of view, it is only the consequences which follow upon an option—consequences in the way of actions and their effects—which render an option momentous. It is only in terms of such consequences that we can speak of vitally significant stakes or of an option as presenting a unique opportunity or of a decision as being irreversible.

If believing one hypothesis rather than another were significantly to affect the way of life of the believer or to influence in any important way the lives of others, the life of the community, or the destiny of the universe, then surely the option in question would involve vitally significant stakes and could be considered momentous. There are in fact many options of this kind, options which are momentous to a greater or less degree. Some of these options involve very general questions—for example, whether or not this is a moral universe in which persons can make demands which other persons are obliged to honor; whether or not among the claimants there is a God who makes demands of man and who is aware of man's needs and responsive to his pleas. Other options involve more specific questions: whether or not one's involvement in a particular war is justified; whether or not a man may be forced to fight in a war which he considers to be immoral; whether or not civil disobedience is a justifiable means of pointing up what one may consider to be evils in society; whether a liberal or a conservative would make a
better government official. What one believes in regard to these questions determines how one acts in particular circumstances. And how one acts in these circumstances can affect one's entire life, the lives of others, and the course of the world to a greater or less degree. In questions like these, the stakes are significant and the options momentous.

As far as the uniqueness of an option and the irreversibility of a decision are concerned, these, too, have meaning only in terms of the consequences of belief. It is difficult to think of an hypothesis which, if not believed today, cannot be believed tomorrow or next year on the assumption that one is still alive to believe tomorrow and next year. It is difficult to think of a belief that one cannot reverse. Many people who believed in the usefulness of capital punishment ten years ago do not believe in it today. However, to believe in something today may enable one to avail himself of a unique opportunity for action—an opportunity which may never present itself again. For example, if one believes that surgically transplanting an organ from one human being to the body of another is morally justifiable, then he may avail himself of the unique opportunity to save the life of a friend by donating to that friend an organ from his own body. If, on the other hand, he believes such an operation to be an unwarranted and even evil tampering with the order of nature, he will not avail himself of the opportunity. True enough, he may come to believe in the good of such surgical procedures in years to come, but the opportunity presented by the option today—
opportunity to save the life of this particular friend in this particular way—will never come again; and for this reason, the option is momentous. It is momentous also because in terms of its consequences the decision is not reversible. Whatever the person may believe in the future about such operations, the consequences of today's belief or disbelief cannot be changed.

It is interesting to note that in giving an example of a momentous option in "The Will to Believe," James himself did not give an example of an option between two hypotheses proposed to one's belief, although it is this type of option which he started out to explain. Instead, he gave us as an example the choice between following or not following a proposed course of action. "Finally, if I were Dr. Nansen and proposed to you to join my North Pole expedition, your option would be momentous; for this would probably be your only similar opportunity, and your choice now would either exclude you from the North Pole sort of immortality altogether or put at least the chance of it into your hands." In using such an example, James seemed to shift his discussion from one type of option, a decision between two hypotheses proposed to one's belief, to another type of option, a decision to act or not to act in a particular way. Whether or not the shift was intentional, it serves to emphasize a very important point in James's philosophy. And that is that a choice between

5 Ibid., p. 35.
hypotheses proposed to one's belief is at bottom a choice between modes of action. For as we saw in Chapter III, belief always involves action in some way, and thus a decision to believe or not to believe a given hypothesis is a decision to act or not to act in a particular manner. The intimate connection between belief and action becomes still more apparent when we consider what James called a forced option.

If an option is not momentous, i.e., if the decision is reversible or if the stakes are trivial or if the opportunity to decide is likely to present itself again, then, of course, there is no urgency about making a decision--unless the option is a forced one. A forced option, James said, is a "dilemma based on a complete logical disjunction, with no possibility of not choosing." Strictly speaking, however, there is no such thing as a forced option in the sense of a case in which one must either profess belief in an hypothesis or reject it. It is always possible, theoretically at least, to suspend judgment. But when one considers the consequences of accepting an hypothesis, rejecting it, and suspending judgment in the matter, one discovers that there are certain cases in which the consequences of suspending judgment--consequences in the way of action--are equivalent to those of rejecting the hypothesis. Let us take as an example the hypothesis that there is a God who cares about man, makes demands of him, and is responsive to his needs. If we neither accept nor reject

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6 Ibid., p. 34.
this proposition but rather suspend judgment in regard to it, our actions, our way of living, will not be those of a believer. On the contrary, we will live as though there were no God even though we have not openly professed disbelief in him. Thus the failure to accept this proposition, the suspension of judgment is, practically speaking, equivalent to rejecting it. From the point of view of our active lives, we either accept this proposition or reject it. From the point of view of action, there is no middle ground, and the option can thus be considered a forced one.

Assuming that one is faced with a genuine option, as described above, James held that the decision ought be made on intellectual grounds, i.e., on the basis of evidence, if sufficient evidence is at hand. But if sufficient evidence is not available (and this is often the case), then the decision can only be made on non-intellectual grounds. If the option is living, momentous, and forced, and if the intellect is not coerced by evidence to assent to one horn of the dilemma, then the choice must be determined by man's willing nature. In this case, faith is the only appropriate response.

There are, of course, many options presented to us which are trivial and which are not forced. The consequences of the truth or falsity of the hypotheses involved are relatively insignificant for us, the community, and the world. In such instances, it is not necessary to choose and it is usually wiser to suspend judgment until all the evidence is in. However, even here, if the evidence is lacking, we are free to
believe at will. We are free to believe what we want to believe in the case of any living options which the intellect by itself cannot resolve, but we do so or not at our own risk. And at times wisdom is best served by caution. For example, most of us, in our efforts to get to know more about the objective nature of the world in which we live through the study of science, are simply recorders of scientific information. Although there may be many other cases in which we make the truth to some degree, in matters of science, the data is independent of most of us. Thus in our efforts as laymen to learn more about the constitution of the universe, there is rarely an urgent need for us to believe any theory for which there is not sufficient evidence. Although a view of the world may indeed be personally supportive and although the discoveries of science very often influence the way in which we manage our everyday affairs, still there are many scientific theories, the truth or falsity of which will not significantly change our lives in any way. No dire consequences will follow if we do not believe them. In cases like these, it seems wiser to suspend judgment than to risk making a mistake. In such instances, the questions are relatively trivial, the choice is seldom forced, and in James's words, "The attitude of sceptical balance is therefore the absolutely wise one if we would escape mistakes."7

But there are other questions which man cannot afford to

7Ibid., p. 51.
approach dispassionately, questions which are most satisfactorily answered by a believing attitude in spite of the lack of evidence. The cases in which faith is the most appropriate and fruitful mental attitude fall into two groups.

First, there are those cases in which being skeptical would amount to losing the truth forever or in which skepticism would be equivalent to disbelief. Here we have those questions which, of their very nature, can never be answered by sense and reason alone in the ordinary course of human life. Moral and religious questions are examples of issues of this type. They are not questions concerning sensible facts which are easily subject to empirical verification; and while men have attempted to resolve them by reason and logic, men have not succeeded in coming up with any universally accepted answers. In cases of this sort, an attitude of faith is appropriate, because sensible proofs and rational demonstrations which are generally convincing are not readily available. And to wait for evidence which either cannot come or is not likely to come would mean losing the truth forever (or at least acquiring it too late) or else be practically equivalent to disbelief. Inasmuch as belief entails action, there are instances in which suspending judgment involves acting as if the proposed hypothesis were false, as we noted above. In such cases, refusing to judge until the evidence is all in is, for practical purposes, equivalent to disbelieving.

Secondly, there are those cases in which faith can bring about its own verification. According to James, there are
numerous instances (some of them involving the moral and religious questions mentioned above) in which faith can and does verify itself. Frequently, for example, a desirable situation can be brought about only by a certain kind of action. But the action necessary to create the desired situation will be successful only if one believes that the desired state of affairs can and will be achieved. For example, one can become a pianist only if he studies and practices diligently. But if he believes that he is not capable of attaining the goal, he will not even try to do so. He will not put forth the necessary effort and will not become a pianist. On the other hand, if one believes that the desired goal is attainable, then he will be inclined to put forth his best efforts, and in all probability he will succeed. In such a case, his faith in the possibility of success is an indispensable factor in achieving success. In an instance of this sort, faith, or confidence, is the most prudent mental attitude to adopt. Certainly when faith can transform a believed hypothesis into a desired fact, it would be foolish not to believe.

One of James's favorite examples of faith verifying itself appears in "Is Life Worth Living" and in "The Sentiment of Rationality." In these essays, James asked his readers to imagine that while climbing the Alps, he found himself in a precarious position the only escape from which involved a terrible leap. Having had no past experience of precisely this kind, he had no certain knowledge of his ability to execute the leap successfully. Nevertheless, faith—hope and
confidence—saved him. 8

... hope and confidence in myself make me sure I shall not miss my aim, and nerve my feet to execute what without those subjective emotions would perhaps have been impossible. But suppose that, on the contrary, the emotions of fear and mistrust preponderate; or suppose that, having just read the Ethics of Belief [written by W. K. Clifford], I feel it would be sinful to act upon an assumption unverified by previous experience,—why, then I shall hesitate so long that at last, exhausted and trembling, and launching myself in a moment of despair, I miss my foothold and roll into the abyss. In this case (and it is one of an immense class) the part of wisdom clearly is to believe what one desires; 9 for the belief is one of the indispensable preliminary conditions of the realization of its object. There are then cases where faith creates its own verification. Believe, and you shall be right, for you shall save yourself; doubt, and you shall again be right, for you shall perish. The only difference is that to believe is greatly to your advantage.10

8 James's example reminds one of Kierkegaard's leap of faith—the leap into the absurd by which Abraham chose to obey God's command to sacrifice Isaac in spite of the irrationality of the act, and the leap of faith by which a man accepts Christianity in spite of the fact that it is beyond reason. Whether James intended it to do so or not, his example points up the fact that every act of faith involves a kind of leap—a leap by which we bridge the gap between the available evidence and the thing to be believed. If neither empirical evidence nor logical arguments take us right up to the object and bring us into direct contact with it, then we can only get to the object by a 'leap of faith.' And just as the physical leap in James's example involved formidable dangers so too the 'leap of faith' always involves risks.

9 Technically, the word 'desires' is correctly used here. But it is an unfortunate choice of words because at least one meaning of the term refers to physical or sensual appetite and even to lust. A word such as 'wants' or 'wishes' would have been less open to misunderstanding. James's thought here is simply that in a case such as the one described, it is wise to believe what one wants to believe, wishes to believe, or even needs to believe.

According to William James, faith is indispensable for both knowledge and action. But faith always involves risks. As a matter of fact, in the case of any genuine option which cannot be resolved on the basis of evidence, there are risks involved in not believing as well as in believing. Whether we choose to believe or not to believe depends upon what risks we prefer to take. We believe at the risk of making a mistake or being duped, for example; on the other hand, we disbelieve or suspend judgment at the risk of losing the truth. But there are more risks involved in each alternative than simply the risk of making a mistake or the risk of losing the truth. For, according to James, when any two hypotheses are opposed to each other, the practical consequences of one must be different from those of the other. Thus choosing to believe or not to believe is more than a choice between truth and falsity; it is also a choice between the practical consequences of the two alternatives in question. The risks involved include more than the risk of losing the truth by refusing to believe or the risk of being duped by believing a false proposition. But for the present, we will confine our remarks to these purely intellectual hazards.

There are two obligations incumbent upon would-be knowers: 1) to believe truth and 2) to avoid error. These are not simply two expressions of one law, but are in fact two separate commandments. And as potential knowers, we can give primacy to one or to the other. In fact, the whole tenor of our intellectual lives will depend upon which of these two
directives we consider primary. For James, the search for truth is of first importance; avoidance of error is secondary. For an Intellectualist, however, the situation is reversed: one's primary duty as a knower is to escape error; acquiring truth is secondary. The Intellectualists reject faith because they are convinced that faith is not a valid grounding for decision; it continually involves the risk of making a mistake since it does not always infallibly put us in touch with the facts. Intellectualists believe that by resisting faith always, they can be sure of never being wrong. James, on the other hand, would prefer to risk making a mistake than to give up his chance of winning the truths which only faith can gain for him.

For James, faith, instead of being the enemy of truth (as it is for the Intellectualists), is its indispensable ally. It is in some degree necessary for all thought and is an attitude of mind in which everyone who claims to know anything de facto indulges. For the existence of truth and the ability of the human mind to attain it are not facts which can be empirically proven or rationally demonstrated, as we have already seen. In fact, any attempt at empirical proof or rational demonstration presupposes them. Thus even those who forbid faith and demand proof for everything, de facto, indulge in the very faith they abhor. Not only do they accept on faith the very possibility of knowledge but their postulation of avoiding error as a knower's primary duty is a matter of faith on their part. For one cannot decide which duty is
primary--to gain truth or to avoid error--on the basis of any
evidence. One's choice is a matter of preference and desire
and, perhaps, even a matter of fear. As James put it, "... these feelings of our duty about either truth or error are in
any case only expressions of our passion..."

It is a question of what one fears most--making a mistake or losing
the truth. The Intellectualist is one who is a slave to his
private horror of being a dupe. But James wrote: "For my own
part, I have also a horror of being duped; but I can believe
that worse things than being duped may happen to a man in this
world. ..."

The Intellectualists, prizing security above all else, prohibit faith because of the risks it entails. But their
prohibition, if obeyed, would stifle man's intellectual facul-
ties and paralyze his active powers. It would stifle his
intellectual faculties by bidding him be so circumspect in
his intellectual gaze that he would never be allowed to look
up from the world certified by sense and reason. In effect,
if obeyed, it would put forever out of reach a whole world of
possible realities simply because they cannot be logically or
empirically verified. It would put forever out of reach all
those truths which cannot be known by sense and reason alone
and all of those possible realities which man's actions could
effect if he had sufficient confidence in his abilities and

11 James, "The Will to Believe," Essays on Faith and Morals, p. 49.

12 Ibid., pp. 49-50.
sufficient faith in the desired goal. The necessity of faith for the well-being of man was apparent to William James. Without faith, man would be deprived of that good which is truth, that good which is responsible human action itself, and all those physical and spiritual goods which, by his actions, man can effect for himself and the world.

James believed that there are certain areas in which only faith can get at the truth. And if faith is forbidden, then in regard to these questions, man must remain forever in the dark. These areas include morality, religion, in general most of the larger questions about life that philosophers ask, and, in some instances, science as well.

Moral questions cannot be answered on the basis of empirical proof or logical demonstration, for a moral question is not a question of what sensibly exists but rather of what is good or of what would be good if it did exist. Science cannot tells us the value of a thing, for simply under the aspect of its material being, a thing is neither good nor bad. According to James, the good is what is felt to be good—what is desired by a sentient being. "Science can tell us what exists; but to compare the worths, both of what exists and of what does not exist, we must consult not science, but what Pascal calls

\[13\] On this point, James might be accused of failing to address himself to the problem of false consciousness raised by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. It must be noted, however, that the problem of false consciousness was not part of James's tradition. James was realistically inclined to take the deliverances of experience at face value, and false consciousness was simply not a problem for him.
In the ethical philosophy of William James, the essence of good is simply to satisfy demands. But demands conflict so that some goods are incompatible with other goods; and if one prevails, a good that is incompatible with it must be given up at least temporarily. The moral philosopher is one who looks for a rule that will tell him which of all conflicting demands ought to be satisfied to the frustration of others. In general, the guiding principle of ethical philosophy, as James saw it, can only be that as many demands as possible ought be satisfied. The best act, he said, is the one which makes the best whole by producing the least amount of dissatisfaction. But in the concrete, it is not possible to know in advance and with absolute certitude all of the consequences which a particular act will entail in terms of the total number of desires it will satisfy or frustrate. In James's words, "...the exact combination of ideals realized and ideals disappointed which each decision creates is always a universe without a precedent, and for which no adequate previous rule exists."  

Thus, neither a moral philosopher nor an ordinary man, seeking the best course of action to follow in a particular concrete dilemma, can expect to find any rule of action which

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14 James, "The Will to Believe," Essays on Faith and Morals, p. 53.
is certified in advance to be the right one. "The philosopher, then, qua philosopher, is not better able to determine the best universe in the concrete emergency than other men." 16

And he, like other men, must adopt an attitude of faith if he is to make a decision at all.

The solving word, for the learned and the unlearned man alike, lies in the last resort in the dumb willingnesses and unwillingnesses of their interior characters, and nowhere else. It is not in heaven, neither is it beyond the sea; but the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. 17

Religious questions are similar to moral questions in that sense and reason alone cannot provide the answers; at least sense and reason cannot provide answers which are generally accepted. Religion, in the traditional sense of the term, posits the existence of an unseen order beyond the world of our experience; and religion states that it is in its relation to this unseen world that our present life finds its true significance and that our interests even now are best served

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 215. This passage, with its biblical tone, calls our attention to the colorful literary style for which William James is noted. No doubt the way in which James wrote about reality reflects to a large extent the way in which he experienced it. But one suspects that his style of writing served a definite purpose as well—the purpose of giving his readers a 'feeling' of reality rather than merely an abstract conceptual view of it. James's colorful examples, his vivid descriptions, his liberal use of metaphor give his philosophical writings the same kind of color, variety, and excitement that he found in experience itself. But life is not merely colorful and exciting. It is serious business. And, whether he intended it to do so or not, James's occasional use of a biblical style serves to emphasize the grave import of the questions under consideration and to point up the seriousness of living itself.
by our believing in this invisible realm. The affirmations of
religion are obviously not subject to empirical verification
in the ordinary course of human life. Mystical experience, not
given to most of us, may serve as empirical evidence for the
mystic; but for the rest of us, faith is our only recourse.
Sense experience as such does not reveal the spiritual world
to us; nor can reason, in the strict sense of a faculty of
inference, give the religious hypothesis a solid foundation.
For all those who think that they have used reason success­
fully to prove religious beliefs to be true, there are others
who feel that reason has succeeded quite well in proving them
false. James believed that the intellect is unable to confront
religious issues and resolve them on the basis of evidence
alone. Only our passional nature can resolve such issues;
and it must do so. The option presented to us by the reli­
gious question is a living option; if not, to discuss it would
be pointless. It is also momentous; the stakes are certainly
not trifling. And, James said, it is a forced option. In his
words:

.. .we see, first that religion offers itself as a
momentous option. We are supposed to gain, even now,
by our belief, and to lose by our non-belief, a certain
vital good. Secondly, religion is a forced option, so
far as that good goes. We cannot escape the issue by
remaining sceptical and waiting for more light, because,
although we do avoid error in that way if religion be
untrue, we lose the good, if it be true, just as cer­
tainly as if we positively chose to disbelieve. 18

18 James, "The Will to Believe," Essays on Faith and
Morals, p. 57.
The religious issue is a fine example of a case in which sus­pending judgment is practically equivalent to choosing not to believe. Religious belief is such that it gives rise to a way of life and mode of action vastly different from that of the non-believer; thus whether one positively disbelieves or simply postpones judgment, he does not act as though the religious hypothesis were true. He acts as though it were false.

In general, the larger questions of life--the questions which philosophers deal with specifically and which most people ask at one time or another, if only in a vague and general way--can rarely, if ever, be answered to everyone's satisfac­tion on the basis of empirical evidence or rational demonstra­tion alone. Philosophers often give lengthy arguments, based upon logic and what they consider to be empirical evidence, in support of their positions; but the fact that different phil­osophers, apparently looking at the same facts, come to dif­ferent and even contradictory conclusions indicates that their conclusions are not propositions to which they are forced to assent by the weight of the evidence. It indicates that there is more involved in their convictions than the evidence alone; it indicates the influence of non-cognitive elements.

The very nature of philosophical questions is such that empirical evidence and rational demonstration cannot give us definitive answers to them. Like religion, philosophy tries to interpret the total character of the world, to determine the individual's place in it, to discover the meaning of life as a whole. But no philosopher experiences the total character
of the world. Reality is so vast and diverse that each philosopher experiences only his own sector of it, and hence no philosophical system can ever explain it completely and be absolutely verified empirically. Thus in whatever stand a philosopher takes, faith plays an important part, his protests to the contrary notwithstanding. A philosopher may attempt to maintain a purely speculative attitude in regard to philosophical issues; he may make every effort to avoid errors by refusing to believe whenever the evidence is not conclusive. And indeed there may be a few philosophical questions that he can afford to approach in such an impersonal way and in regard to which he can afford not to make a decision. But most of the questions of philosophy, like those of religion, are such that one cannot afford to suspend judgment. One's mode of life even now depends upon what he believes about the universe, the meaning of life, and his role in the whole scheme of things. If a philosopher, or any other man, is to live and to act, he must take a stand on these issues. And since he cannot take it on the basis of conclusive evidence, he is left with one alternative—faith.

James claimed that, de facto, a man's philosophical view is an expression of his temperament; it is more or less a "dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means."\(^{19}\) James agreed with Hegel that the aim of knowledge is to make a man feel more at home in the world. But the world is a multi-faceted

\(^{19}\)James, Pragmatism and Four Essays from The Meaning of Truth, pp. 17-18.
reality. And depending upon his temperament and character, one facet of it may be more congenial to a given man than another. A man will feel more at home in the world if his own particular temperament is considered to be an essential feature of the universe. As James put it, "Different men find their minds more at home in very different fragments of the world."20 Thus all philosophers "have conceived of the whole world after the analogy of some particular feature of it which has particularly captivated their attention."21

A man's temperament influences his philosophical thinking more than any strictly objective premises. "It loads the evidence for him one way or the other..."22 A man trusts his temperament. He wants a universe that suits it and he believes in a conception of the universe which does suit it. "If we take the whole history of philosophy, the systems reduce themselves to a few main types which, under all the technical verbiage in which the ingenious intellect of man envelops them, are just so many visions, modes of feeling the whole push, and seeing the whole drift of life, forced on one by one's total character and experience, and on the whole preferred--there is no other truthful word--as one's best working attitude."23

That faith plays a part in religious issues is fairly

20 James, A Pluralistic Universe, p. 11.
21 Ibid., p. 8.
22 James, Pragmatism and Four Essays from The Meaning of Truth, p. 19.
23 James, A Pluralistic Universe, pp. 20-21.
well conceded by almost everyone. That it enters into philos-
ophical judgments is, of course, a less acceptable view. But
that it comes into play in matters of science--this is the
least acceptable opinion of all. From an Intellectualist's
point of view, such a suggestion is preposterous. And yet it
was James's opinion that scientists rely upon faith, not only
in their day to day living as other men do, but also in their
work as scientists.

Like all men, scientists have faith in the capacity of
man's mind for truth, the lack of proof notwithstanding. But
more than that, a fundamental principle of science, in fact a
principle upon which all scientific progress depends, is
unquestionably a matter of faith. That principle is the
assumption that nature is intelligible and that nature always
acts in the same way. It cannot be proven that nature tomor-
row will follow exactly the same laws that it follows today,
and yet the scientist, as well as the layman, believes and
acts upon the principle that the course of nature is uniform.
It can be said that this uniformity is congenial to both of
them. And indeed progress in science, as well as the smooth
operation of everyday affairs, seems to owe much to the fact
that men accept this principle of uniformity and live by it.

Furthermore, men of science have their own individual
faiths--their own pet theories (sometimes no more than hunches)
which they work tirelessly to verify. Sometimes experimenta-
tion proves them wrong, but often their faith, patience, and
effort lead to the discovery of a truth which otherwise would
not be known. Many a truth would remain undiscovered and many a technological advance would not be made if men of genius—scientists, philosophers, and others—did not follow their hunches and cling to their beliefs in spite of the lack of supporting evidence. Galileo, for example, clung to his belief in the Copernican theory that the earth is but a planet moving around the sun, in spite of the fact that the everyday experience of most men seemed to support the view that sun, moon, and stars moved around the earth. And by his investigations, Galileo contributed to the wealth of evidence in virtue of which the theory of Copernicus is today the commonly accepted view. In the area of technology, modern communication owes much to the work of Alexander Graham Bell. It was Bell's faith in the theory that the varying sound of a person's voice could be made to vary the intensity of an electrical current, which varying electrical current could then be reproduced as speech, that inspired the tireless investigation and experimentation which culminated in his perfecting the telephone.

Science owes its progress and advancement to the desires of individual men to get their own faiths confirmed, to the determination with which men of sensitivity and imagination hang on to their uncertified belief that the truth must lie in one direction rather than in another. In science, it is not uncommon for two men, observing the same data, to espouse contradictory theories about them. One might well wonder how it is that one scientist can believe a theory on the basis of the same empirical facts which prompt another to reject it;
but according to James, this is possible because everyone of any mental originality is sensitive to evidence that bears in some one direction. The fact that two scientists, looking at the same empirical data, espouse contradictory theories indicates that more is at work in the game than their intellects alone. Desire, instinct, and feeling are active too.

For the purely judging mind, i.e., for the speculative mind, perhaps a cautious skepticism in matters of science is better than faith. As we pointed out earlier, this is true for the layman in science; he can afford to wait for the evidence without any great loss. But for purposes of discovery, it is better to risk making an error than to risk not finding the truth at all. If nothing is ventured, nothing is gained.

Thus, in scientific investigation, skepticism and faith work together. "The most useful investigator, because the most sensitive observer, is always he whose eager interest in one side of the question is balanced by an equally keen nervousness lest he become deceived." 24

It is evident, then, that there are certain kinds of truth—moral, religious, philosophical, and scientific—that would never be had were faith not permitted to enter into one's mental life. It could even be suggested that the Intellectualists' prohibition of faith is a prohibition of mental fecundity. But to forbid faith is not only to forbid intellectual progress—to forbid faith is to forbid life. It is

to forbid action and all those goods which human actions can create. Without faith, action, understood in a human sense, is impossible. For in any complex problem, our conclusions about what is the best course of action to follow can, from the point of view of the conclusiveness of the evidence, never be more than probable. Assuming that time will continue and that the items in our present situation will continue into the future (beliefs for which we have no guarantee), we can never be absolutely certain what the consequences of our proposed actions will be. If the environment affected by our activities were fixed or stabilized, if we knew all the properties of the items in it and how these things would react in all possible circumstances, then we could foresee all the possible consequences of our actions. In such a case, we could decide which consequence we would prefer and, at least being certain of getting a desired result, act accordingly. But we live and act in a world which no one of us can know completely—a world which is continually changing. Hence we cannot, with either absolute certitude or, in many cases, even relative certitude, predict what effects our actions will have on the world. From an ethical point of view, that action is best which satisfies the greatest number of desires and claims at the least cost; but not only are we unable clearly to foresee the results of our action on the empirical world, we are not perfectly aware of all the desires and claims of those whom our actions may affect. Thus in deciding which of several alternative courses of action to follow, the most we can hope
for is a high degree of probability. But according to James, even a degree of probability is rarely able to be proven. Hence we must let our 'feelings' and our 'good will' tell us where the greater probability lies and act upon it as though the lesser probabilities did not exist. In other words, for practical purposes, we act as though the most probable view were the certain view. The probability of our action having the desired effect may be expressed in a fraction or percentage. For example, a particular act may produce a certain effect four times out of five, or eighty per-cent of the times. But we cannot translate the fractional probability of success into a fractional action. We cannot perform only four-fifths or eighty per-cent of the act in question. We must either act or not act; there is no middle ground which might match the probability of the possible results. Thus when we act we must go all the way and in the example given incur a twenty per-cent risk of failure. We must act wholly for one or the other alternative. In other words, we must act on faith. "We must go in for the more probable alternative as if the other one did not exist, and suffer the full penalty if the event belies our faith." To act only upon beliefs certified by evidence would in most cases be not to act at all, and often not to act on one belief is equivalent to acting as if the opposite belief were true.

The necessity of faith for action is thus apparent. Any

25James, Some Problems of Philosophy, p. 227.
action that is not merely instinctive presupposes conviction. But, as we have seen, except for the data of the immediate present, doubt concerning matters of fact and the possible outcome of proposed courses of activity is always possible. For the most part, the beliefs which precede responsible activity cannot be certified by proof and therefore fall into the category of faith. Responsible action requires faith not only in regard to the best course of activity to follow but also in regard to our own freedom. If action is to be responsible, we must be aware of our freedom not to act at all; we must be aware of our freedom to act otherwise than we do. But from the point of view of James, freedom is not something which can be empirically proven or rationally demonstrated. It is something which one must accept without proof— it too is a matter of faith that must be lived daily.

Thus, to forbid faith is to render man sterile and unproductive from the point of view of both knowledge and action. To prohibit faith is to render unattainable all of the truths which sense and reason alone cannot discover, all of the realities which responsible human action can bring into being, and also all the truths and realities which faith itself can help to create in those unique instances in which it verifies itself.

The fact that faith in certain instances can verify itself makes faith a formative factor in the shaping of our world. We can to some degree make the world what we want it to be, if we but believe it to be so and act as if it were so. If we believe the world to be all bad and the evil to be irremediable,
for example, we will do nothing to improve things (on the as-
sumption that the situation is hopeless) and our despair and
gloom will add to, and be part of, the world's bad character.
But if we believe that the world is to some degree good and
that it can be made better, we will act accordingly. We will
fight the evils and try to alleviate them, and the world will
be better for that, at least in the sense that it will contain
the manly virtue and courage that our own actions exhibit.

According to James, the Intellectualists suppose that the
world, for all practical purposes, is completely finished in
advance of our dealings with it, and that our beliefs and
actions, while somehow a part of the world, cannot change it
in any important way or contribute significantly to its meaning.
Thus, from an Intellectualist's point of view, faith has no
significant role to play in determining the world's destiny.
James, however, maintained that the world is not completely
finished and that it is an empirical fact that human actions
and beliefs can shape the course of experience and significantly
determine to some degree the very character of the universe
itself. There are questions about the universe, questions
about reality, the answers to which can actually be created by
faith at least in part. For example, is life worth living?
Is this a moralistic world? Can the world be improved—made
better? Life is worth living; this is a moral universe; this
is a melioristic world, i.e., human action can bring this
pluralistic world to greater perfection. These are all exam-
pies of faiths which, to a degree, can verify themselves. As
James put it, "...often enough our faith beforehand in an
uncertified result is the only thing that makes the result come
ture."

Optimism and pessimism were topics much discussed in
James's day especially in Germany, and James was very much
interested in the debate. From his point of view, the mental
attitude which best fits the character of the universe depends
upon the individual and upon his trust or mistrust of the uni­
verse. If one believes that the world is all bad, and that
life is not worth living, and if he ends his life by suicide,
then he makes the world, his world at least, all bad by his
act and deprives it of whatever perfection he might have con­
tributed to it had he continued to live. If, on the other
hand, he believes it to be good, at least partially so, and
if, instead of despairing, he braves the evils he finds in
life, defies pain and fear, he will prove the world to have
some goodness about it. It will be good not only to the extent
that his own moral courage, which is an integral part of it,
is good but also to the extent that the world, with whatever
evils it contains, called forth his heroic efforts in the first
place. As James put it, the bad character of the world was
the conditio sine qua non of the good character of the man's
actions. A world which can produce heroic virtue cannot be
all bad. And the exhilaration which one derives from the
battle with evil as well as the satisfaction and joy which

26 James, "Is Life Worth Living?" essays on Faith and
Morals, p. 28.
accompanies each new victory can certainly make life worth living for a man at least on a day to day basis.

Thus, if we believe the world to be bad, our belief will help to make it so; but if we believe the world to be good, it will be good. And if we believe that life is worth living, our faith will make it worth living. The character of the universe depends upon each man's personal contribution to it. But each one's contribution depends upon what he believes the world's character to be. James wrote:

Wherever the facts to be formulated contain such a contribution, we may logically, legitimately, and inexpugnably believe what we desire. The belief creates its verification.\textsuperscript{27} The thought becomes literally father to the fact, as the wish was father to the thought.  

The moral or non-moral character of the universe is another question the answer to which depends at least in part upon a man's belief in one alternative or the other. Is this a moral

\textsuperscript{27}James would not have us think that, in each and every instance of believing what we want to believe, the belief will verify itself. There are obviously cases in which it may not. One of James's own examples of beliefs which can verify themselves, but are not guaranteed to do so, involves human relations. Let us assume that I want a particular person to like me, but I have no evidence that he does so. If I believe that he likes me and, confident of a friendly response on his part, act amiably toward him, my action may elicit from him an expression of friendship. It may elicit from him the expression of a liking which he already felt or it may evoke the liking itself. However, it is always possible that my strategy will not work, that forthcoming evidence will show my trust to have been misplaced. This is the risk involved in faith; but if I am unwilling to take this risk, I may well lose a good that can come, if it comes at all, only through believing.

\textsuperscript{28}James, "The Sentiment of Rationality," Essays on Faith and Morals, p. 103.
universe? Are judgments of right and wrong objectively valid; or are they merely expressions of our own uniquely personal and subjective sensibilities? Is there such a thing as moral obligation? Is there incumbent upon man an obligation to act in a certain way—an obligation that stems from the very nature of things and the fulfillment of which is necessary for the world's welfare? Is there a certain kind of conduct which is required for the well-being of the universe and its inhabitants?

From James's point of view, there is no strictly logical demonstration which will give us an absolutely certain 'yes' or 'no' in answer to these questions. Nor is there any single scientific experiment the result of which will definitively solve the problem for us once and for all. Rather the whole of one's life is a kind of experiment which will contribute its share to the total solution. The answers can come only if each of us assumes one position or the other and acts accordingly. Suppose we assume that this is a moral universe imposing obligations upon us and suppose that we act to fulfill them. If we are right, the consequences of our actions will serve to verify in part our belief. Perhaps we shall see the world, at least the small part of it affected by our acts, visibly improved by our doing what we conceive to be our duty. But even if the salutary effects of our good deeds are not immediately apparent and our belief does not receive any positive verification during our lifetime, our faith may still be partially verified in a negative way insofar as nothing in the
course of experience, as affected by our actions, will conflict with our belief and force us to reverse it.

However, whatever the nature of the universe may be from a moral point of view, our discovery of the truth in the matter depends upon our assuming one position or the other and acting upon it. The verification of either alternative—the moral character or the non-moral character of the world—depends upon our believing in it in advance. If we are right, experience will back us up; at least it will not force us to reverse our position.

In a question as broad as this, of course, complete verification is not the work of one man. Whether or not the universe in its overall character is moral cannot be empirically known, according to James, until all races of men have contributed their actions to it. Only the experience of the entire human race can make the verification of either alternative. In a question of this sort, every person must take a stand, for this question involves a forced option. There is no middle ground. To remain skeptical about the validity of moral obligations is to act as though they were invalid. In James's words,

He who commands himself not to be credulous of God, of duty, of freedom, of immortality, may again and again be indistinguishable from him who dogmatically denies them. Scepticism in moral matters is an active ally of immorality. Who is not for is against. The universe will have no neutrals in these questions. In theory as in practice, dodge or hedge, or talk as we like about a wise scepticism, we are really doing volunteer military service for one side or the other.

29 Ibid., p. 109.
In regard to the melioristic character of the universe, James held that the world is a pluralism of independent powers which by their activities can bring it to greater perfection or reduce it to rubble. But whatever good they succeed in accomplishing will depend in large measure upon their antecedent belief in each other. A social organism can be a success only if each member does his duty with a trust that the other members will at the same time do theirs. "Wherever a desired result is achieved by the co-operation of many independent persons, its existence as a fact is a pure consequence of the precursive faith in one another of those immediately concerned."30

In social action, in playing our parts in the social whole, there is always risk involved. We may do our best, but others may not do theirs. And their actions or failures to act will influence the result. If they do not cooperate, our efforts may be wasted. According to James, we can take one of four attitudes in regard to the other powers:

1. We can follow the Intellectualist's advice, wait for the evidence, and, while waiting, do nothing.

2. We can mistrust the other powers and, sure that the universe will fail, let it fail.

3. We can trust them and, in any case, do our best in spite of the uncertainty of the outcome.

4. Finally, we can flounder, trusting them one day and

mistrusting them the next.

According to James, "This 4th way is no systematic solution. The 2d way spells faith in failure. The 1st way may in practice be indistinguishable from the 2d way. The 3d way seems the only wise way."31

If we do our best and the other powers do theirs, this world will be perfected. As James pointed out, this proposition is not a statement of fact. But it is like the major premise of a hypothetical syllogism. What is needed is a premise of fact—the actual good will and the best efforts of all the powers concerned. If the premise of fact is supplied, the perfected world will emerge as the logical conclusion. But the premise of fact will not be supplied unless, trusting that our fellows will do their share of the work, we proceed to put forth our best efforts. If, believing in one another, we all do our best, we shall create the direction of development; and, James said, "only so can the making of a perfected world of the pluralistic pattern ever take place."32

Thus faith is indeed a formative factor in the destiny of the universe. Insofar as there is still work to be done in the world, insofar as the character of the world's results may in part depend upon our actions, and insofar as our actions depend upon our beliefs, the shape of the world depends upon our indulging our faith-tendencies. According to James, these faith-tendencies are simply expressions of good will toward

31James, Some Problems of Philosophy, p. 230.
32Ibid.
certain forms of results. They exert a powerful influence upon man's thinking—in his attempts to answer the larger questions of life as well as in his practical decisions. These faith-tendencies are very active psychological forces, which constantly outstrip evidence and lead men to conclusions which are beyond the powers of sense and reason alone to corroborate. As James pointed out, the logic of faith is not the logic of reason. James spoke of the stages through which the mind passes in its ascent from a simple tendency to believe to a full-blown conviction as the "faith-ladder." The steps in the faith-ladder, i.e., the affirmations which the mind makes in its ascent are as follows:

1. There is nothing absurd in a certain view of the world being true, nothing self-contradictory;
2. It might have been true under certain conditions;
3. It may be true, even now;
4. It is fit to be true;
5. It ought to be true;
6. It must be true;
7. It shall be true, at any rate true for me.

These steps are not a chain of inferences, but, according to James, they constitute "a slope of good-will on which in the larger questions of life men habitually live." But the simple tendency to believe which impels us to climb the ladder in the first place springs from the creative regions of the heart—from the most secret recesses of our being where our willingnesses and unwillingnesses, our loves, desires, hopes,

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33 Ibid., p. 224.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
and fears lie hidden. The heart, said James in eulogistic fashion, is our deepest organ of communication with the nature of things. He no doubt saw that genuine knowledge of anything is more than a matter of purely intellectual or sensory apprehension, that it is a matter of sympathy as well—a matter of love by which we somehow enter into the very interior of the reality. As Martin C. D'Arcy, S.J., has pointed out, "It [knowledge] is galvanized and interpenetrated through and through with love. . . ." James knew that the deepest knowledge that we can have of anything involves a kind of intuition analogous to the ineffable knowledge which a lover has of his beloved. The heart, he said, is the source of all our outer deeds and decisions. And although we may not always be able to defend our beliefs and actions with arguments that will satisfy the scientist and the logician, the consonance of our beliefs, or the objects of our beliefs, with our passional nature is enough to make us cling to them and vouch for them with our active lives.

The Intellectualists, however, discount the significance of climbing the faith-ladder. They claim that truth can best be served only if we resist our faith-tendencies and believe nothing for which we do not have conclusive evidence. From the Intellectualists' point of view, the heart has no place in the determination of our beliefs. The intellect alone, responding to evidence, is the only legitimate determinant of

our convictions. In thus forbidding us to climb the faith-ladder, the Intellectualists, as we have seen, debar us from ever attaining any truths which cannot be readily verified by logic or experience. What is more, they render inaccessible all those truths which sense and reason could verify, if our original belief in them was sufficient to prompt us to seek the verification. And, of course, the intellectualists put forever out of reach all those truths which faith itself can help to create, i.e., all those truths which can exist only on the assumption that actions based on faith in a desired end bring them about.

James believed that the Intellectualists' attitude is an irrational one.

I, therefore, for one, cannot see my way to accepting the agnostic rules for truth-seeking, or wilfully agree to keep my willing nature out of the game. I cannot do so for this plain reason, that a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule. That for me is the long and short of the formal logic of the situation, no matter what the kinds of truth might materially be.37

Although James succeeded in justifying a believing attitude in regard to any question for which there is not sufficient evidence to make a decision, his special concern was to justify faith in religious matters. He felt that religion was perhaps man's most important function and that defending religious belief might be his own uniquely religious act. As we have noted, he spoke of using faith to answer such questions

as "Is life worth living?"—"Is this a moral world?"—"Should the definition of the world be optimistic, or at least melioristic?" He showed how faith can answer all these questions affirmatively and can contribute to the actualization of the desired state of affairs. But at bottom all of these questions rest upon the religious question. They lead us to the religious question, for we cannot confront them without confronting it. To give an unqualified affirmative answer to them, an enthusiastic affirmation without any reservations, one must believe in the affirmations of religion.

Whatever satisfaction may come in day to day living from the struggle to overcome evil and to increment the good, if there is no power which will somehow guarantee that the values for which we fight will be eternally preserved, there is still something left to be desired. The effort to overcome evil and to bring about good in the world may make life worth living on a day to day basis; but without a God, it cannot make life worth living in the long run.

If this were merely a human world without a God, it would, according to James, still be a moral world. It would still be a world in which each man's needs and desires would function as valid claims upon other men. It would still be a world of objective demands and obligations. But without a God among the claimants, the appeal to our moral nature would fall short of its maximum stimulating power. The claims of other men, unless these men be persons with whom we are closely associated or to whom we are bound by ties of love, are seldom enough to spur
us on to heroic virtue or enthusiastic effort. But the demands of a Divine Claimant call forth the best that is in all of us. "Every sort of energy and endurance, of courage and capacity for handling life's evils, is set free in those who have religious faith."38 In a world without God, life, to be sure, would still be "a genuinely ethical symphony";39 but, according to James, it would be played "in the compass of a couple of poor octaves, and the infinite scale of values"40 would fail to open up.

In regard to the question of optimism versus pessimism, if there is no God, if the world's destiny is controlled by the blind forces of matter, if the end of everything is the dissolution of all that is good and beautiful (as the mechanical evolutionists say it is), then the definition of the universe cannot be an optimistic one. It cannot even be melioristic, because whatever improvements human actions may make in the world will one day be reduced to nothing. If there is no God, the definition of the universe can only be pessimistic.

The faith that is needed to make life really worth living in the long run, to spark us into energetic and enthusiastic moral action, to enable us to take an optimistic, or at least a melioristic, view of the world must be a faith that overarches all of these issues. It must be a religious faith.

39 Ibid., p. 212.
40 Ibid.
And because religious faith is so needed, it is, in William James's mind, justified.
CHAPTER V

THE LIFE OF RELIGION: "MANKIND'S MOST IMPORTANT FUNCTION"\(^1\)

William James held that the purpose of thought and conviction is to specify, as well as partially to evoke, our active response to the universe as we experience it. Thought comes to rest in belief; belief gives rise to action. And what we believe about the world determines the kind of activity by which we respond to the impressions which it makes upon us. "Beliefs, in short, are rules for action," wrote James in agreement with Charles Peirce, "and the whole function of thinking is but one step in the production of active habits."\(^2\) Though a man can react to the world in many ways, James felt that the type of responses engendered by a man's belief in the hypotheses of religion are more fruitful and salutary to himself and to the world at large than any other. Nothing fulfills the task of making life worth living quite as well as religious conviction does.

Our purpose in this chapter will be to examine in detail the religious response to the universe. After briefly comparing this response in a general way with other possible modes

\(^{1}\) Letter from James to F. R. Morse, Letters of William James, II, 127.

\(^{2}\) James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 339.
of reacting to the world, we shall give special consideration to the nature of religious belief itself, its causes, and its effects upon the life of the individual believer as well as upon the world as a whole. We shall not examine doctrines which are peculiar to any given cult, but will confine our attention to that general vision of reality which appears to be common to all religions. The question of the truth of this religious vision, however, will be left for in depth discussion in Chapter VI.

The universe presents itself to most men at one time or another as a place of pain. There may be some 'congenitally' happy individuals by whom the evils of the world pass unnoticed. But few men of sensitivity and perception can overlook the presence of evil in the world. Moreover, every man must decide for himself how he will respond to this world with its evils. After tasting the sorrows of life, he may decide that life in this world is not worth living and try to escape from it by committing suicide as many men have done. The suicide of the man who feels that life is not worth living, however, is a negative response as far as this world is concerned.

3"In many persons," James said, "happiness is congenital and irreclaimable." (The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 77.) "With many men," he wrote, "the question of life's worth is answered by a temperamental optimism which makes them incapable of believing that anything seriously evil can exist." ("Is Life Worth Living?", Essays on Faith and Morals, p. 2.)

4"That life is not worth living the whole army of suicides declare,—an army whose roll-call, like the famous evening gun of the British army, follows the sun round the world and never terminates." (James, "Is Life worth Living?," Essays on Faith and Morals, p. 6.)
It provides no real remedy for the evils of life. In fact the act of suicide only adds to the evidence that the world is a dark and forboding place.

If you surrender to the nightmare view and crown the evil edifice by your own suicide, you have indeed made a picture totally black. Pessimism, completed by your act, is true beyond a doubt, so far as your world goes. Your mistrust of life has removed whatever worth your own enduring existence might have given it. ... 5

From a pragmatic point of view, then, suicide in itself accomplishes nothing positive in the fight against evil 6 and amounts to forfeiting the chance of winning whatever goods might come as a result of staying around to brave the struggle.

The man who chooses to remain in the world, however, must somehow face the ills and misfortunes of life and overcome them if he can. The search for happiness is likely to be his chief concern. "How to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness, is in fact for most men at all times the secret motive of all they do, and of all they are willing to endure." 7 But the search for human happiness for oneself and for others involves the effort to alleviate pain and suffering--to find some remedy for the evils which afflict mankind.

One form of suffering which seriously interferes with human happiness is the sense of division which most men

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5Ibid., p. 29.

6It is possible, of course, that one person's suicide may call the attention of other people to evils prevalent in the community or in the world and prompt these people to try to alleviate the evils. However, the act of suicide itself is not a remedy for them.

7James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 76.
experience within themselves at one time or another during their lives—the experienced inner struggle between conflicting tendencies. This discordancy may vary "from something so slight as to result in a merely odd or whimsical inconsistency, to a discordancy of which the consequences may be inconvenient in the extreme." A small degree of inconsistency may be relatively harmless.

This amount of inconsistency will only count as amiable weakness; but a stronger degree of heterogeneity may make havoc of the subject's life. There are persons whose existence is little more than a series of zigzags, as now one tendency and now another gets the upper hand. Their spirit wars with their flesh, they wish for incompatibles, wayward impulses interrupt their most deliberate plans, and their lives are one long drama of repentance and of effort to repair misdemeanors and mistakes.

A man becomes aware of his inner division in his relations with the world that he encounters in experience. Actively respond to this world he must; but he sometimes experiences simultaneous tendencies to respond to it in opposite ways. And in choosing one response, he knows that he must lose, at least for a time, the advantage attached to the other. The internal struggle itself is painful and the pain is increased by the anticipated loss of some wished-for good. Such discordancy often makes a man hesitant and indecisive in his response to the universe. It results in delayed action. In some cases, it results in the failure to act at all and the consequent loss of whatever good, private or public, prompt resolute action

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8 Ibid., p. 141.
9 Ibid., p. 142.
might have accomplished.

The divided man is an unhappy man, not only because in-
ternal conflict is itself painful and because much good can
be lost as a result of his indecision and failure to act, but
also because such internal division seems to intensify those
sufferings which are foisted upon him by the external world.
Our externally inflicted wounds are more difficult to bear
insofar as we are internally torn asunder by simultaneous
tendencies to respond to them in opposite ways. For instance,
a man injures us and we are torn between the magnanimous ten-
dency to forgive him and the selfish inclination to take revenge.
The pain of internal torment is thus added to the externally
causd sorrow. To take another example, society itself is in
turmoil and we as individuals, as well as the community as a
whole, suffer from it. How do we respond? We are torn between
the selfish tendency to look out for our own interests, to
lessen our own sufferings while letting our neighbors take
care of themselves, and the expansive desire to help the com-
munity at large even though in so doing we may not fare quite
so well as far as our own private interests are concerned.
Not only is the externally caused suffering aggravated by the
internal conflict but the somewhat paralyzing indecision which
accompanies the conflict often renders our efforts to overcome
the evils that afflict us and our neighbors ineffective. If
we had perfect control over ourselves, we could more easily
cope with the enemy without.

It seems, then, that if we reject suicide and elect to
stay here and fight, a prerequisite to overcoming the evils in the external universe is the unification of our own personalities. Psychologists tell us that some persons

are born with an inner constitution which is harmonious and well balanced from the outset. Their impulses are consistent with one another, their will follows without trouble the guidance of their intellect, their passions are not excessive, and their lives are little haunted by regrets.10

But most of us are not so fortunate. Not constituted by nature with such an abnormally harmonious personality, most of us must struggle to overcome the division within ourselves so that we can focus all of our efforts upon the task of meeting the world as whole men.

Now in all of us, however constituted, but to a degree the greater in proportion as we are intense and sensitive and subject to diversified temptations, and to the greatest possible degree if we are decidedly psychopathic, does the normal evolution of character chiefly consist in the straightening out and unifying of the inner self. The higher and the lower feelings, the useful and the erring impulses, begin by being a comparative chaos within us—they must end by forming a stable system of functions in right subordination.11

Divisions within a man are usually the result of his being attracted by incompatible goals, i.e. by goals which cannot be realized simultaneously because of the limitations of time and space. An individual normally has many purposes and ends which, together with the ideas associated with them, take turns in occupying the center of his attention; but when these goals are incompatible with each other and when the person's interest shifts rapidly from one to another, he can

10 Ibid., p. 141.
11 Ibid., p. 143.
be said to have a divided personality. A man may be said to be divided also, but in a somewhat lesser sense, when one group of goals occupies the center of his interest and is the main principle of his activities while another group of goals, that cannot be realized at the same time as the first group, occupies the periphery of his consciousness as mere pious wishes.\textsuperscript{12}

A less complete way in which the self may be divided is the simultaneous coexistence of two or more different groups of aims, of which one practically holds the right of way and instigates activity, whilst the others are only pious wishes, and never practically come to anything. Saint Augustine's aspirations to a purer life ... were for a while an example. Another would be the President in his full pride of office, wondering whether it were not all vanity, and whether the life of a woodchopper were not the wholesomer destiny. Such fleeting aspirations are mere \textit{velleititates}, whimsies. They exist on the remoter outskirts of the mind, and the real self of the man, the centre of his energies, is occupied with an entirely different system.\textsuperscript{13}

James pointed out that as life goes on, there may be a more or less constant change of our interests and "a consequent change of place in our systems of ideas, from more central to more peripheral, and from more peripheral to more central parts of consciousness."\textsuperscript{14} James explains such changes as follows:

\begin{quote}
What brings such changes about is the way in which emotional excitement alters. Things hot and vital to us today are cold to-morrow. It is as if seen from the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12}James apparently presumed that words like 'goal' and 'end' were so well understood that they would present no problems for his readers. At any rate, he did not attempt to explicate them philosophically in his writings; rather he left this task for his fellow pragmatist, John Dewey.

\textsuperscript{13}James, \textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience}, pp. 160-61.

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 161.
hot parts of the field [of consciousness] that the other parts appear to us, and from these hot parts personal desire and volition make their sallies. They are in short the centres of our dynamic energy, whereas the cold parts leave us indifferent and passive in proportion to their coldness.\(^{15}\)

James said that when there is great fluctuation in a man's emotional interest, the man is divided more or less seriously.

Now there may be great oscillation in the emotional interest, and the hot places [in the field of one's consciousness] may shift before one almost as rapidly as the sparks that run through burnt-up paper. Then we have the wavering and divided self. . . .\(^{16}\)

Such a divided self will become unified, however, if the "focus of excitement and heat"\(^{17}\) comes to lie permanently within a certain system of ideas. The unified self is one whose interest is more or less permanently centered on one group of related goals and the ideas associated with them and who is not peripherally distracted by ideas opposed to them. James called the group of aims and ideas to which a man devotes himself and from which he works "the habitual centre of his personal energy."\(^{18}\) The life of the unified self is more or less permanently dominated by this one system of goals; and all of his activities, if not directly conducive to their attainment, are at least not detrimental to it. All events are judged in the light of their relation to this vital center of interest. All decisions are made, all problems solved, with these ends in

\(^{15}\)Ibid.

\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 162.

\(^{17}\)Ibid.

\(^{18}\)Ibid.
view; if these aims are not always in the foreground of a man's thinking, they are at least exerting their influence in the background insofar as they form the habitual focal point of his energies.

The system of aims and ideas which comes to occupy the center of a man's interest and to govern his active life may be religious, non-religious or even irreligious. A man's life can be ruled by religious ideals, by ambition, by revenge, by cupidity, by patriotism, by love for mankind, or by any number of other interests, good or bad. In James's words:

... to find religion is only one out of many ways of reaching unity; and the process of remedying inner incompleteness and reducing inner discord is a general psychological process, which may take place with any sort of mental material, and need not necessarily assume the religious form... For example, the new birth may be away from religion into incredulity; or it may be from moral scrupulosity into freedom and license; or it may be produced by the irruption into the individual's life of some new stimulus or passion, such as love, ambition, cupidity, revenge, or patriotic devotion. In all these instances we have precisely the same psychological form of event,—a firmness, stability, and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and inconsistency.\(^{19}\)

Whatever the principle of unification, the unification, once achieved, brings with it a characteristic type of relief insofar as the internal strife is ended, even though other evils yet remain to be faced. James felt, however, that the kind of unification which brings with it the greatest peace and produces the most lasting and most salutary effects is that of religious conversion as a result of which religious ideas,

\(^{19}\)Ibid., pp. 146-47.
previously peripheral in a man's consciousness, take a central place and "religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy." Unification under the banner of self-gratification and immorality only results in disintegration again; for the desire for pleasure always wars with the necessity for resignation to those sufferings which are unavoidable in human life. And this disintegration which is inevitable in a life abandoned to self-indulgence renders a man's efforts to cope with the external world haphazard and ineffectual. Thus it is only when the self is unified (whether for religious or merely moral reasons) in the service of that which is good—good not merely for oneself but also for others—that self-unification can be permanent and can enable one to engage in the battle against pain and suffering with any hope of success.

Eliminating suicide, then, as a negative response and immorality as a response which is both unproductive and harmful, we are left with morality and religion as the only two ways of reacting to the universe which can offer us any hope of a fruitful and relatively happy existence. Although morality and religion, as ways of responding to the world, are not totally unlike, their differences are striking. They have this in common, of course, that the moral man and the religious man are less concerned with their own private interests than they are with the good of others and the well-being of the world as a whole. In speaking of morality, James wrote, "A life is

20 Ibid., p. 162.
manly, stoical, moral, or philosophical, we say, in proportion as it is less swayed by paltry personal considerations and more by objective ends that call for energy, even though that energy bring personal loss and pain."21 The religious man, too, manifests a deep concern for the welfare of others. As James pointed out, a man reaches the height of religious perfection in saintliness, one of the features of which is a "shifting of the emotional centre towards loving and harmonious affections, towards 'yes, yes,' and away from 'no,' where the claims of the non-ego are concerned."22

In comparing and contrasting the moral and the religious types of personality, James indicated that both the moral man and the religious man accept the world with its evils as well as their responsibilities to it. They both shoulder their burdens and undertake to perform their duties, however difficult, without complaining. And yet the spirit with which the one responds to the world is vastly different from the spirit of the other.

Morality pure and simple accepts the law of the whole which it finds reigning, so far as to acknowledge and obey it, but it may obey it with the heaviest and coldest heart, and never cease to feel it as a yoke. But for religion, in its strong and fully developed manifestations, the service of the highest never is felt as a yoke. Dull submission is left far behind, and a mood of welcome, which may fill any place on the scale between cheerful serenity and enthusiastic gladness, has taken its place.23

21 Ibid., p. 52.
22 Ibid., p. 217.
23 Ibid., p. 49.
The moral man enlists in the service of the good despite the dangers to himself; he does not shrink from his task. There is in the moralistic personality a kind of stoical resignation in the face of suffering and a courageous determination to continue the fight against evil in spite of personal loss and pain. James had great respect for the moral man and described the moral response to the universe in glowing terms:

And for morality life is a war, and the service of the highest is a sort of cosmic patriotism which also calls for volunteers. Even a sick man, unable to be militant outwardly, can carry on the moral warfare. He can willfully turn his attention away from his own future, whether in this world or the next. He can train himself to indifference to his present drawbacks and immerse himself in whatever objective interests still remain accessible. He can follow public news, and sympathize with other people's affairs. He can cultivate cheerful manners, and be silent about his miseries. He can contemplate whatever ideal aspects of existence his philosophy is able to present to him, and practice whatever duties, such as patience, resignation, trust, his ethical system requires. Such a man lives on his loftiest, largest plane. He is a high-hearted freeman and no pining slave.24

The religious man, like the moral man, also engages in the struggle against evil and the service of the good without regard for personal risks, but his attitude toward the sufferings that befall him is not one of stoical resignation. Rather the attitude of the deeply religious man toward suffering is one of enthusiastic espousal; he is even known to rejoice in suffering as a form of sacrifice to God.

The differences in the attitudes of the moral man and the religious man toward life can no doubt be traced to the different

24 Ibid., p. 52.
ways in which the two men experience the world and themselves. Both the moral man and the religious man experience the world as a place of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, good and evil. As James wrote to Tom Ward, "... the fact remains empirically certain ... --that men suffer and enjoy."25 And the experiences of both the moral man and the religious man testify to the fact that the suffering and enjoyment of individuals depend not only upon those individuals' own actions but upon the actions of other men as well. Both the moral man and the religious man are empirically aware that their actions can affect the lives of other men for better or worse. And both assume the responsibility of affecting them for the better. The moral man and the religious man alike, aware that they can lessen the pain of others and increase their joy by effective action, undertake the task of fighting evil and promoting good. But the experienced world in which the religious man performs his task has a spiritual dimension of which the moral man is not aware. The religious man senses that his world is but a part of a wider, more spiritual world. He has a conviction, "not merely intellectual, but as it were sensible,"26 of the existence of a higher, more spiritual power with whom he is in touch. And it is also his experience that he receives help from this higher power as a result of prayer and sacrifice. Thus, in somewhat mythical fashion, he sees the fight with

25Letters of William James, I, 130.
26James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 216.
evil, not as his own private battle, but as a joint venture in which he and God cooperate in the achievement of ideals which somehow have everlasting value. For the religious man, the good life is not merely a matter of fighting evil and promoting good. It is that, of course, as it is for the moralist. But for the religious man, it is at the same time the service of "the deepest power in the universe"\textsuperscript{27}--a power who holds dear the things which man holds dear, "the things themselves being all good and righteous things"\textsuperscript{28}--a power who is friendly to man and upon whose help and protection he can rely. The religious man feels that his true destiny lies in trustful self-surrender to God's will and in loving cooperation with the Divine purposes. "To co-operate with his [God's] creation by the best and rightest response seems all he wants of us. In such co-operation with his purposes, . . . must lie the real meaning of our destiny."\textsuperscript{29}

The vision of the moral man, on the other hand, is confined to this world; he does not experience himself or his world as having any relation to a higher unseen order. He is not aware of his fight against evil as having significance in any world beyond this world of his day to day experience. Nor is he aware of the existence of any higher spiritual power who is friendly to him and from whom he receives help in performing

\textsuperscript{27}James, "Reflex Action and Theism," Essays on Faith and Morals, p. 122.
\textsuperscript{28}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 141.
his task. He is not conscious of receiving any of the supernatural assistance upon which the religious man counts. From the point of view of his own conscious experience, then, the moral man fights his battle alone (except for whatever help other men may provide). Because of this fact, the moral man's response to the world with its strange mixture of good and evil requires great volitional effort. And as long as he can maintain this effort, the moralist will indeed be a match for the universe. However, as James pointed out, there are times in the life of almost everyone when this effort cannot be sustained. Strenuous moral effort becomes increasingly more difficult in times of illness, in old age, and in the face of approaching death. There are occasions when it becomes virtually impossible to maintain the moral attitude. At such times the insufficiency of morality becomes apparent. In James's words:

The moralist must hold his breath and keep his muscles tense; and so long as this athletic attitude is possible all goes well—morality suffices. But the athletic attitude tends ever to break down, and it inevitably does break down even in the most stalwart when the organism begins to decay, or when morbid fears invade the mind. To suggest personal will and effort to one all sicklied o'er with the sense of irremediable impotence is to suggest the most impossible of things. What he craves is to be consoled in his very powerlessness, to feel that the spirit of the universe recognizes and secures him, all decaying and failing as he is. Well, we are all such helpless failures in the last resort. The sanest and best of us are of one clay with lunatics and prison inmates, and death finally runs the robustest of us down. And whenever we feel this, such a sense of the vanity and provisionality of our voluntary career comes over us that all our morality appears but as a plaster hiding a sore it can never
cure, and all our well-doing as the hollowest substi-
tute for that well-being that our lives ought to be
grounded in, but, alas! are not.30

That sense of well-being which James says "our lives ought
to be grounded in" can be had only in religion; for it is only
the loving and sacrificial spirit of religion that can make a
man find joy in suffering and peace and security in the face
of the failure, tragedy, and death which are so much a part of
the human situation.

And here religion comes to our rescue and takes our
fate into her hands. There is a state of mind, known
to religious men, but to no others, in which the will
to assert ourselves and hold our own has been dis-
placed by a willingness to close our mouths and be as
nothing in the floods and waterspouts of God. In this
state of mind, what we most dreaded has become the
habitation of our safety, and the hour of our moral
death has turned into our spiritual birthday. The time
for tension in our soul is over, and that of happy
relaxation, of calm deep breathing, of an eternal pre-
sent, with no discordant future to be anxious about,
has arrived. Fear is not held in abeyance as it is
by mere morality, it is positively expunged and washed
away.31

Thus morality alone can enable a man to get through life
only up to a point. It can enable him to do what is necessary
in a manly dignified and even admirable way; it even adds zest
to life—the zest that accompanies victory when one conquers
an evil, the satisfaction that comes with the achievement of
some desired good. Morality can indeed make life worth living
on a day to day basis. But all of man's best efforts terminate
in death, and whatever joys and satisfactions he may have in
this life are always marred by the threat of impending loss.

30James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 53.
31Ibid.
If one's attitude toward life is merely moralistic, if one does not see himself and his world as part of a larger more spiritual order, if one sees reality entirely from a materialistic point of view, i.e., as inevitably subject to dissolution, then he must expect that whatever good he accomplishes, whatever ideal values he may realize, will not survive this life any more than he will. Thus will his victories always be tinged with bitterness.

It was James's opinion that in order for life to be worth living in the long run—not merely on a day to day basis—a man needs more than simple morality, i.e., more than morality unrelated to religion. A man needs to feel that his ideals and values will be cared for long after he has ceased to be able to fight for them; he needs an everlasting moral order in which his values will be forever preserved. "This need of an eternal moral order," James wrote, "is one of the deepest needs of our breast."32 And, James said, the "notion of God, ... however inferior it may be in clearness to those mathematical notions so current in mechanical philosophy, has at least this practical superiority over them, that it guarantees an ideal order that shall be permanently preserved."33 In order for man to enjoy the fullest measure of that well-being which James believed man ought to have, man needs to believe

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32 James, Pragmatism and Four Essays from The Meaning of Truth, p. 77.

33 Ibid.
that there is a God who cares for, and will continue to care for, him and the things he loves—a God who will guarantee that goodness and righteousness and beauty will survive permanently and will not decay along with the material universe. "A world with a God in it to say the last word, may indeed burn up or freeze, but we then think of him as still mindful of the old ideals and sure to bring them elsewhere to fruition; so that, where he is, tragedy is only provisional and partial, and shipwreck and dissolution not the absolutely final things."34

It is the conviction that the world is in the hands of God and that, because of Him, all will be well in the long run, no matter how difficult things may seem here and now, that makes religious men feel that life is worth living in an unqualified sense. The religious man does not necessarily suffer any fewer misfortunes than the non-religious man. His troubles, sorrows, and afflictions may be as numerous and, in some cases, even more numerous than those of the non-religious man. But the conviction that the whole world is in friendly divine hands35 makes him better able to support the trials and tribulations of life than the man without religious faith and enables him to function productively and happily in spite of life's hardships. The religious man's belief that the whole

34 Ibid.

35 "Most religious men believe (or 'know,' if they be mystical) that not only they themselves, but the whole universe of beings to whom God is present, are secure in his parental hands. There is a sense, a dimension, they are sure, in which we are all saved, in spite of the gates of hell and all adverse terrestrial appearances." (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 390.)
world, himself included, is in the care of a superior benevolent power elicits from him "a willing self-surrender to its control." And it is this surrender, which is truly a self-unification in the sense that all personal desires and concerns are subordinated to, indeed abandoned to, the will of God, that especially distinguishes the religious man from the merely moral man. "This abandonment of self-responsibility seems to be the fundamental act in specifically religious, as distinguished from moral practice."  

In this self-surrender the religious man finds happiness and joy even in the face of outward misfortune; indeed he finds a kind of happiness and joy which no merely moral effort seems able to produce. Religion "adds to life an enchantment which is not rationally or logically deducible from anything else." It is true that the moral person shoulders his responsibilities and performs his duties manfully and without complaint; it is true that he endures pain and suffering with courage and resignation. But the religious man, the saintly man in particular, meets his responsibilities with happy enthusiasm and embraces suffering with joy. 

If religion is to mean anything definite for us, it seems to me that we ought to take it as meaning this added dimension of emotion, this enthusiastic temper of espousal, in regions where morality strictly so called can at best but bow its head and acquiesce...  

36 Ibid., p. 217.  
37 Ibid., p. 229.  
38 Ibid., pp. 53-54.
This sort of happiness in the absolute and everlasting is what we find nowhere but in religion.39

James saw the religious life not only as happier than the moral life; he saw religion also as necessary for the general well-being of the individual and indispensable for the welfare of the world as a whole. In order to understand James's position in this regard, it behooves us to consider in somewhat greater detail what, in his view, the religious response to the world actually entails.

James defined religion in The Varieties of Religious Experience as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."40 He pointed out, however, that there are cults which are considered religious but which do not seem to worship a concrete personal Deity—cults similar to the Emersonian transcendentalism of his own day, for example. "Not a deity in concreto, not a superhuman person, but the immanent divinity in things, the essentially spiritual structure of the universe, is the object of the transcendentalist cult."41 Because of this fact, James, in defining religion, was careful to interpret the term 'the divine' somewhat broadly. For the purposes of his description of religious phenomena, he defined the divine as whatever a man considered to be the most primal and most enveloping reality,
but "only such a primal reality as the individual feels impelled to respond to solemnly and gravely, and neither by a curse nor a jest."\textsuperscript{42}

James recognized the difficulty involved in trying to draw sharp lines of distinction in the area of religious phenomena. As he pointed out,

solemnity, and gravity, and all such emotional attributes, admit of various shades; and, do what we will with our defining, the truth must at last be confronted that we are dealing with a field of experience where there is not a single conception that can be sharply drawn. . . . Things are more or less divine, states of mind are more or less religious. . . .\textsuperscript{43}

Realizing that where the religious state of mind is only weakly manifested, there may be some question about its being religious at all, James chose to concern himself in \textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience} only with those phenomena which are unquestionably religious. Accordingly, the examples which he gave us of religious individuals are largely persons in whom the religious characteristics are marked and often exaggerated. "The only cases likely to be profitable enough to repay our attention," he wrote, "will therefore be cases where the religious spirit is unmistakable and extreme."\textsuperscript{44}

As James's definition of religion implies, religion involves a vision of reality and a way of life consonant with that vision. James said that the religious man, whatever the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42}Ibid., p. 47.
\item \textsuperscript{43}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{44}Ibid., p. 48.
\end{itemize}
specifics of his individual creed may be, sees the visible world as "part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance . . . ."45 The meaning of the term 'spiritual' in this passage needs some clarification. Although James used the term 'spirit' differently in different texts, the word seems to have a fundamental meaning to which his various uses can be related in one way or another. Basically James used the term to distinguish the mental aspects of reality from the non-mental or material aspects of it. He used the term 'spiritual' rather broadly, for example, to refer to the mental aspect of experience, i.e., to that aspect of experience which can be called mind or consciousness—not, however, to mind or consciousness considered merely as knowing but to mind considered also as willing. Thus the spiritual aspects of reality are the mental and moral aspects of experience. When James wrote that the religious man sees the visible world as part of a more spiritual universe, he meant that for the religious man, the actual universe is one in which mind or consciousness exerts much more influence and control over things than it appears to exert in the immediately visible world. For the religious man, the world is ruled, not by blind physio-chemical forces but by mind and will, or specifically by mental and moral powers superior to man's. (Although cults similar to the transcendentalism mentioned above46 do not

45Ibid., p. 47.

46See above, p. 181.
worship any superhuman consciousness, for the most part, James confined his discussion in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* to the phenomena of more traditional religion.) The world of the typically religious man is thus a spiritual world—a world in which some kind of superhuman consciousness, friendly to man, is in control of things and has the last word. The religious man sees union with this higher spiritual power as man's true end and communion with it as bringing him salvation and happiness.

One might wonder what it is that leads a man to see reality in this way. James believed that in most cases it is a man's feelings of weakness, wrongness, and need that bring him to this view of life. In James's opinion, religious belief is grounded in feelings of this kind, particularly in a sense of uneasiness, which, "reduced to its simplest terms, is a sense that there is something wrong about us as we naturally stand."47 This uneasiness may be only a vague sense of disquietude—a kind of nameless fear. It may be a feeling of helplessness in the face of suffering and pain; or it may be a sense of the hollowness and "vanity of mortal things."48 In more mentally developed persons, James said, the feeling of uneasiness is the feeling that there is something morally wrong about them—something morally wrong from which they need to be saved. "In those more developed minds which alone we are studying, the

47 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 383.
48 Ibid., p. 136.
wrongness takes a moral character, and the salvation takes a mystical tinge."49

By moral wrongness, James apparently meant a wrongness about our active lives. This wrongness may or may not involve a conscious failure to fulfill moral obligations. The feeling that there is something morally wrong about one may or may not be a sense of sin. For example, with no feeling of guilt, one may simply feel an inability actively to cope with the problems of life—an inability to make decisions perhaps or an inability to carry out decisions once made. With no sense of sin, he may experience a sense of failure—perhaps only the failure to achieve the goals which he has set up for himself. In some cases, however, the feeling of wrongness may be the feeling that there is something wrong about the human situation in general. It may be a sense of futility in relation to all human goals and pursuits. The inevitability of death, for instance, may make all human life and activity devoid of meaning. James gave us a fine example of this latter kind of uneasiness in the experience of Tolstoy. "I felt," wrote Tolstoy, "that something had broken within me on which my life had always rested, that I had nothing left to hold on to, and that morally my life had stopped."50 Again James quoted Tolstoy:

"What will be the outcome of what I do to-day? Of what I shall do to-morrow? What will be the outcome of all

49Ibid., p. 383.

50James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 130, quoting Tolstoy, My Confession.
my life? Why should I live? Why should I do anything? Is there in life any purpose which the inevitable death which awaits me does not undo and destroy?"51

"Tolstoy's preoccupations were largely objective," James said, "for the purpose and meaning of life in general was what so troubled him. . . ."52

In many another individual cited by James, however, the experienced moral wrongness was of a much more personal character and did involve an acute feeling of guilt or sense of sin. Such was the experience of John Bunyan as recorded in his autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and quoted by James as follows:

"But my original and inward pollution, that was my plague and my affliction. By reason of that, I was more loathsome in my own eyes than was a toad; and I thought I was so in God's eyes too. Sin and corruption, I said, would as naturally bubble out of my heart as water would bubble out of a fountain."53

James did not elaborate in any of his writings upon the nature of the moral wrongness known as sin. In a very general way, of course, moral wrongness of this type can be described as an unwholesome condition of one's personal self. However, it is clear that, for James, this unhealthy condition of the self, more often than not, implies unacceptable relations with other persons. The predominantly social aspect of ethics in James's philosophy may not be obvious in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, although it is frequently suggested there;

51 Ibid., p. 131.
52 Ibid., p. 133.
53 Ibid., p. 134.
but it is clearly indicated in James's essay, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life." The essay stresses the fact that ethical obligations are rooted in the demands and claims made by conscious beings upon one another. Morality, for James, is primarily a social affair; and while it may surely involve satisfying a man's own personal needs and desires, it requires that in satisfying them, he consider the desires and claims of other persons (one of whom may well be divine) and that he always aim at a state of affairs in which the greatest number of goods (i.e., satisfied demands) are realized at the least cost. From James's point of view, it is a man's failure, real or fancied, to meet this requirement that usually gives rise to his uneasy feeling that there is something morally wrong with him in the sense that there is about him a sinfulness from which he needs to be delivered.

Whatever the kind of wrongness with which men feel themselves afflicted, however, it is as the means of deliverance from this wrongness, as the remedy for their uneasiness, that religion most frequently offers itself to them. Religion promises men salvation--salvation for themselves and for the world --if, by prayer and self-surrender, they make the proper connection with higher, more spiritual powers operative in the universe. Thus, James said, all religion (with a few exceptions) involves an 'uneasiness' and 'a solution'--an uneasiness in the sense of a consciousness of evil, a consciousness of

54See above, p. 56.
being in need—a solution in the sense that man is aware of deliverance, salvation, or redemption coming as a result of communion with powers higher than himself. "The solution," James wrote, "is a sense that we are saved from the wrongness by making proper connection with the higher powers." 55

Before we proceed further, however, it must be pointed out that there are some religious people for whom religion is not at all a matter of redemption from a state of being wrong. These are the healthy-minded people with an habitually optimistic view of life as opposed to those morbid-minded people, described above, who have such an acute sense of evil in their own lives and in the world that only a supernatural power can cure them. 56 Although the more common religious experience is that of morbid-minded persons, our consideration of religious belief would be incomplete if we did not include a description of the religion of healthy-mindedness. Accordingly, before examining the experience of salvation and deliverance which characterizes the religious life of morbid-minded individuals, we will digress and briefly consider the healthy-minded personality and some of the characteristics of healthy-minded religion.

Healthy-minded people are optimistic people. Their

55 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 383.

56 The difference between healthy-minded and morbid-minded temperaments should not be understood as the difference between non-pathological and pathological mentalities. For, as a matter of fact, both types of temperament can be either non-pathological or pathological.
attention is habitually focused upon what is good in this world; and if they are not altogether unaware of evil, they either ignore it, deny its reality, or refuse to give it any significance in their reflections upon life. James distinguished between two types of healthy-mindedness—an involuntary type and a voluntary type. "If, then, we give the name of healthy-mindedness to the tendency which looks on all things and sees that they are good, we find that we must distinguish between a more involuntary and a more voluntary or systematic way of being healthy-minded." Involuntary healthy-mindedness is a "way of feeling happy about things immediately." People of this temperament are spontaneously happy; they either do not see the evil in the world at all or the good appears so obviously and overwhelmingly abundant that evil seems quite insignificant to them. Their optimistic attitude is not one that is consciously cultivated but is the result of a natural temperamental bias. A person of this type has "a temperament organically weighted on the side of cheer and fatally forbidden to linger, as those of opposite temperament linger, over the darker aspects of the universe." Unlike the morbid-minded person who is more or less habitually pessimistic and who is "congenitally fated to suffer" from the consciousness of evil, the

57 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 83.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., p. 79.
60 Ibid., p. 116.
spontaneously healthy-minded person is endowed with a "temperament which has a constitutional incapacity for prolonged suffering, and in which the tendency to see things optimistically is like a water of crystallization in which the individual's character is set." 61

Systematic healthy-mindedness, on the other hand, is a deliberately adopted mental attitude. James described systematic healthy-mindedness as "an abstract way of conceiving things as good." 62 And just as in every abstract way of conceiving something, one aspect of the thing is considered essential to it, at least at that time, while other aspects are ignored, so too systematic "healthy-mindedness, conceiving good as the essential and universal aspect of being, deliberately excludes evil from its field of vision." 63 James pointed out that while a systematically healthy-minded attitude is an unrealistic way of looking at life, experience points to its advantages. It is an empirical fact, for example, that evils often lose much of their painfulness for us if we deliberately face up to them and try to bear them cheerfully.

Refuse to admit their badness; despise their power; ignore their presence; turn your attention the other way; and so far as you yourself are concerned at any rate, though the facts may still exist, their evil character exists no longer. Since you make them evil or good by your own thoughts about them, it is the ruling of your thoughts which proves to be your principal concern. 64

61 Ibid., p. 112.
62 Ibid., p. 83.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., p. 84.
Moreover, experience shows that an optimistic view of things is not only salutary for us as individuals but makes life easier for those around us and thus commends itself to us on altruistic grounds.

The attitude of unhappiness is not only painful, it is mean and ugly. What can be more base and unworthy than the pining, puling, mumping mood, no matter by what outward ills it may have been engendered? What is more injurious to others? What less helpful as a way out of the difficulty. It but fastens and perpetuates the trouble which occasioned it, and increases the total evil of the situation. At all costs, then, we ought to reduce the sway of that mood; we ought to scout it in ourselves and others, and never show it tolerance.65

Although healthy-minded people are not necessarily religious, among those who are, we can distinguish two types of religious attitudes corresponding to the two types of healthy-mindedness described above. Let us take as our first example the religion of those spontaneously happy people who are possessed of an involuntarily healthy-minded temperament. With them, happiness is congenital; they do not seem to need salvation or deliverance. At least they do not feel any such need. From the beginning of their conscious lives, they are possessed of an acute sense of the goodness of God and of all that God has made and they rejoice in the divine goodness. "It is to be hoped," James wrote, "that we all have some friend, perhaps more often feminine than masculine, and young than old, whose soul is of this sky-blue tint, whose affinities are rather with flowers and birds and all enchanting innocencies

65 Ibid.
than with dark human passions, who can think no ill of man or God, and in whom religious gladness, being in possession from the outset, needs no deliverance from any antecedent burden.\textsuperscript{66}

Such is the religious outlook of persons endowed with a spontaneously healthy-minded temperament.

There is another religious attitude, however, which, while optimistic, is not naturally and spontaneously so. Rather its optimism is a deliberately adopted posture; it involves the systematic cultivation of healthy-mindedness. Such consciously adopted optimism can be found in varying degrees among the members of many different religious sects. There are some religious movements, however, in which the deliberate cultivation of healthy-mindedness plays a relatively significant role. In fact, there are some religious cults in which it is a central theme.

Although James did not consider healthy-mindedness to be an attitude typical of traditional Christianity, he did feel that it was making significant inroads into the Christian religion during his time.

The advance of liberalism, so-called, in Christianity, during the past fifty years, may fairly be called a victory of healthy-mindedness within the church over the morbidness with which the old hell-fire theology was more harmoniously related. We have now whole congregations whose preachers, far from magnifying our consciousness of sin, seem devoted rather to making little of it. They ignore, or even deny, eternal punishment, and insist on the dignity rather than on the depravity of man. They look at the continual preoccupation of the old-fashioned Christian with the salvation of his

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p. 77.
soul as something sickly and reprehensible rather than admirable; and a sanguine and 'muscular' attitude, which to our forefathers would have seemed purely heathen, has become in their eyes an ideal element of Christian character.\(^{67}\)

The significance of systematic healthy-mindedness as a religious attitude, however, can best be seen in a religious movement which was just getting under way in James's day, a religious movement which James variously designated as the 'Mind-Cure Movement' or the 'New Thought.' Although the several sects of the movement may differ from one another in various ways, they all agree in their optimism. James described the 'New Thought' as "a deliberately optimistic scheme of life, with both a speculative and a practical side."\(^{68}\) On the speculative side, the individual creeds of the disciples of the 'New Thought' differ in particular details, but the common thread running through them all is the doctrine that the sub-conscious part of man's higher nature is really one with God and that since all is well with God, all is well with man. "The spiritual in man appears in the mind-cure philosophy as partly conscious, but chiefly subconscious; and through the subconscious part of it we are already one with the Divine without any miracle of grace, or abrupt creation of a new inner man."\(^{69}\)

On the practical side, the 'Mind-Cure Movement' bids its followers to think and to act, in short to live, in the light of their belief in the oneness of their life with the life of God.

\(^{67}\) Ibid., p. 85.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., p. 87.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., p. 92.
It bids them to ignore evil and generally to turn their attention away from weakness, disease, pain, and suffering and to think thoughts of strength, health, success and well-being. It bids them keep in mind that just as nothing can be wrong with God, nothing can be wrong with them since their lives are one with God's life. As one 'Mind-Cure' disciple wrote to William James, "... how can a conscious part of Deity be sick?—since 'Greater is he that is with us than all that can strive against us.'"70

"The leaders in this faith," James wrote, "have had an intuitive belief in the all-saving power of healthy-minded attitudes as such, in the conquering efficacy of courage, hope, and trust, and a correlative contempt for doubt, fear, worry, and all nervously precautionary states of mind."71 Accordingly, they try to foster in their disciples wholesome, optimistic mental attitudes and have developed a system of mental hygiene which "is wholly and exclusively compacted of optimism."72 However the various 'Mind-Cure' sects may differ from one another, as indicated above, they generally agree in the doctrine that human life is one with the life of God and that since all is well with God, all must be well with man. Their common attitude toward evil is to ignore it, to act as though it were not there. James felt that of all the 'Mind-Cure'

70 Ibid., p. 93.
71 Ibid., p. 88.
72 Ibid., p. 97.
religions, Christian Science is the most radical in its attitude toward evil. "For it evil is simply a lie, and any one who mentions it is a liar. The optimistic ideal of duty forbids us to pay it the compliment even of explicit attention."\(^7\)

Although a good many people were attracted to 'Mind-Cure' religion in James's day and still are, as the rosters of Christian Science and similar sects testify, the saving religion which offers itself to morbid-minded persons as the means of deliverance from their wrongness is much more prevalent. While James pointed out that 'Mind-Cure' must be considered a genuine religious power and devoted almost two complete lectures to a discussion of it in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, he apparently considered the experiences of morbid-minded individuals as much more typical of religious persons than the experiences of the healthy-minded. For, once he completed his discussion of healthy-minded religion, he proceeded to describe religious experience almost exclusively in terms of the experience of the morbid-minded man.

James did not presume to judge the truth or falsity of 'Mind-Cure' religion. In fact, he pointed out that for some people it has verified itself, at least to the extent that they have experienced improved health and increased happiness after espousing it. James did indicate, however, that 'Mind-Cure' religion is less consonant with human experience than the 'saving' religion which attracts the morbid-minded, because

\(^{7}\)Ibid., p. 96.
"Mind-Cure" religion tends to disregard a major aspect of human life—the experience of evil. After all, evil is, in some way, a part of every man's existence. As James pointed out, the healthiest and most prosperous life contains moments of disappointment, illness, and danger; "take the happiest man, the one most envied by the world, and in nine cases out of ten his inmost consciousness is one of failure." In bidding man to ignore evil, then, 'Mind-Cure' religion is advising him to ignore, or at least to treat as unimportant, an inescapable portion of human experience—a portion of human experience which the greater number of men cannot so easily overlook.

To return to our discussion of the religion of salvation, the kind of religion with which most of us are more familiar, let us look more closely at the morbid-minded personality to whom it appeals. Morbid-minded people, whom James also called 'sick souls,' are people who, rather than closing their eyes to evil or minimizing its importance as healthy-minded people do, recognize evil as a significant aspect of human life and are, to a greater or less degree, disturbed by its presence.

James spoke of two levels of morbid-mindedness—a shallower level and a level more profound and formidable. On a superficial plane, there are individuals who recognize evil as real but who do not see it as demanding any religious or supernatural remedy. They see evil as merely a maladjustment between man and things, between man and his environment. "Such

74 Ibid., p. 119.
evil as this is curable, in principle at least, upon the natural plane, for merely by modifying either the self or the things, or both at once, the two terms may be made to fit, and all go merrily as a marriage bell again."\textsuperscript{75} On a deeper level, however, one finds individuals "for whom evil is no mere relation of the subject to particular outer things, but something more radical and general, a wrongness or vice in his essential nature, which no alteration of the environment, or any superficial rearrangement of the inner self, can cure, and which requires a supernatural remedy."\textsuperscript{76} Since it is to people at this deeper level of morbid-mindedness that religion with its offer of salvation is most appealing, we will, in the pages that follow, use the terms 'sick soul' and 'morbid-minded' to refer only to people who suffer from morbid-mindedness of this more profound type.

It must be noted, however, that this more radically morbid outlook on life also admits of degrees; and, accordingly, James divided sick souls roughly into two groups. In the first group are individuals who experience both good and evil in life, both success and failure, joy and sorrow, satisfaction and remorse. However, their joy and satisfaction in the happy and successful moments of life are to a greater or less degree "spoiled and vitiated"\textsuperscript{77} by their awareness that all natural goods perish, that their successes and triumphs are only momentary,

\textsuperscript{75}Ibid., p. 117.
\textsuperscript{76}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77}Ibid., p. 120.
and that death is inevitable. "Back of everything is the great spectre of universal death, the all-encompassing blackness..."

In the second group, we find people whom James described as pathologically melancholy. The morbid-mindedness of these individuals is deeper still than that of the first group of sick souls, for whom the lustre of natural goods is simply dulled by their transience. Pathologically melancholy people are the victims of "a pitch of unhappiness so great that the goods of nature may be entirely forgotten, and all sentiment of their existence vanish from the mental field." James pointed out an interesting similarity between the devotee of healthy-mindedness and the pathologically melancholy person: "As the healthy-minded enthusiast succeeds in ignoring evil's very existence, so the subject of melancholy is forced in spite of himself to ignore that of all good whatever: for him it may no longer have the least reality."

Whatever the degree of his morbid-mindedness, the sick soul is, at the time of his disillusionment and unhappiness, a divided personality, a personality characterized by some kind of discordancy. James spoke of him as having "an incompletely unified moral and intellectual constitution." James described the sick soul's personality as heterogeneous and pointed out that the heterogeneity is most evident in the

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78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., p. 124.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., p. 141.
individual whose morbid condition has reached the pathological level. The sick soul's cure demands the integration of his personality. As we saw earlier, however, the unification of a man's personality can be achieved in a variety of ways, the most effective of which are morality and religion. And of the two, religion produces the most startling results. Morality, as we have seen, can enable a man to face life, its trials, and vicissitudes with stoical resignation; it even adds a kind of zest to life and enables a man to enjoy a moderate amount of happiness, at least for a time. But religious unification does much more than this. When it is complete, it enables man to accept life and all of its sufferings, pains, and uncertainties with joy and enthusiasm. It adds a degree of zest and happiness to life which no other kind of unification can produce. As James put it,

However it come, it [unification] brings a characteristic sort of relief; and never such extreme relief as when it is cast into the religious mould. . . . Easily,

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82 No doubt James's knowledge of heterogeneous personality can be traced in large measure to his work as a psychologist and in particular to his work in abnormal psychology. However, there can be no doubt that James owed much of his knowledge on this subject to his own Calvinistically religious background. James was aware that the story of man's religious development is largely the story of his struggle to bring his own natural impulses and tendencies in line with the ideals of one religious creed or another. The records of the early life of James's father indicate that Henry James, Sr., experienced such a painful inner struggle resulting from the conflict between his own natural love of life and the restrictions imposed upon him by his family's Calvinistic faith. William James, himself, who experienced a good deal of mental conflict in his own life, was no stranger to inner discord of a religious nature. As we saw in Chapter I, for example, he possessed a strong natural desire to believe in God and yet was greatly disturbed by religious doubts in his youth.
permanently, and successfully, it often transforms the most intolerable misery into the profoundest and most enduring happiness.\textsuperscript{83}

The process, be it sudden or gradual, by which the sick soul is cured through the religious unification of his personality is called conversion. "To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities."\textsuperscript{84} The group of ideas to which a man devotes himself and from which he works James called the habitual center of his personal energy. When a man is converted, religious ideals, previously peripheral in his consciousness, assume a central place; religious aims absorb his attention and become his habitual center of energy. The divine becomes the focal point of his interest.

The process of conversion may be either voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary conversion is a gradual regenerative process consisting in the deliberate building up, piece by piece, of a new set of moral and spiritual habits. Involuntary conversion, on the other hand, occurs suddenly; and the man converted, because of the lack of conscious effort on his part, often has a sense of being influenced by powers, other than

\textsuperscript{83} James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 146.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p. 157.
himself, to which he surrenders. Because of this experience of being acted upon by something other than oneself, the surrender of self to higher powers is often spoken of as though it were the distinguishing characteristic of sudden and involuntary conversion as opposed to gradual and voluntary conversion. Accordingly Prof. E. D. Starbuck in his *Psychology of Religion* spoke of the two modes of conversion as the volitional type and the type by self-surrender. Such a classification is misleading, however, because, as James pointed out, self-surrender is an indispensable factor in all conversion. Even in the most voluntary regenerative process, the personal will seems unable to bring about the complete and perfect unification of the personality by itself. In James's words,

> Even in the most voluntarily built-up sort of regeneration there are passages of partial self-surrender interposed; and in the great majority of all cases, when the will has done its uttermost towards bringing one close to that complete unification aspired after, it seems that the very last step must be left to other forces and performed without the help of its activity. In other words, self-surrender becomes then indispensable.  

No matter how experiences of religious conversion may differ, whether they be voluntary or involuntary, gradual or sudden, it seems accurate to say that, in every case, the person involved becomes aware that while there is something wrong about him, his wrongness is not irremediable, that there is at least a germ of something better in him. The fact that a man can criticize himself and be unhappy about his wrongness, James said, is evidence that there is something higher and better in  

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The individual, so far as he suffers from his wrongness and criticises it, is to that extent consciously beyond it, and in at least possible touch with something higher, if anything higher exist. Along with the wrong part there is thus a better part of him, even though it may be but a most helpless germ.  

In the process of conversion, the individual becomes aware that this higher and better 'part' of him, as James loosely put it, is "conterminous and continuous with a MORE of the same quality," i.e., with a personal consciousness, higher than, but not unlike, his own. This 'More' is operative in the universe outside of him, i.e., it is experienced as a power other than himself; and the man converted becomes aware that by keeping in working touch with it and by getting "on board of" it, he can save himself when his own lower being goes to pieces. The individual is moved to trust this Power, to give himself up to it, to abandon himself to its care; and this self-surrender, an indispensable aspect of all conversion, brings with it a tranquillity and peace previously unknown.

How the 'More' is conceived may vary from man to man; but generally, it is thought of as the highest, or deepest, power in the universe, as having a mental and moral personality similar to man's, as holding good and righteous things dear, as recognizing and caring about man, his needs, and his ideals.

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86 Ibid., p. 383.
87 Ibid., p. 384.
88 Ibid.
Between the divine personality and the human personality there is thought to be this similarity and relationship: no matter how they differ, they both have purposes for which they care (to some extent mutually) and "each can hear the other's call."89

The more specific details of the nature of the deity are matters of individual creeds—creeds which are elaborated out of individual, communal, and even cultural experiences by men's intellects in line with their individual feelings and wants. But however the specific characteristics of the 'More' may be conceived, the realization in the conversion experience that one's destiny is linked up with such a Divine reality, that "one's life as a whole is in the keeping of a power whom one can absolutely trust"90 is accompanied by a great sense of peace and inner security. "Fears and anxieties go, and blissful equanimity takes their place."91 This peace, which is born of the assurance that all is well with one and will be well in spite of any unfavorable external circumstances, is but one of the immediate effects of the conversion experience, however. In addition, there is often the perception, by the subject, of truths hitherto unknown, although the newly acquired knowledge can seldom be clearly expressed in words. Frequently, too, the subject feels that the world itself has changed; the universe

91 Ibid., p. 217.
takes on freshness and beauty that seemed not to be there before. But the effect which is most characteristic of the conversion experience is the ecstasy of happiness which accompanies it and the tranquillity which follows it.

The happiness which comes with conversion is not a joy that results from the elimination of all evils, nor is it a healthy-minded kind of happiness that ignores evil. It is a happiness in spite of evil—a joy in spite of pain. The happiness of the religious man is something much more complex than the simple contentment which one who has never suffered might experience; as a matter of fact, it includes suffering as one of its elements. To the converted man, natural evil is no longer a source of anguish and terror; rather it appears to be swallowed up in supernatural good. As the personal biographies of religious men revealed to William James, a person once possessed by such religious happiness no longer seeks to escape pain. Knowing all the while that in the hands of God he is safe and secure even in the most violent of storms, the religious man enthusiastically espouses personal hardships and misfortunes as forms of sacrifice.

It is this complex sacrificial attitude, typical of all kinds of religious consciousness, which accounts for the fact that religion can perform an essential function in our lives which no other attitude toward life can fulfill. As James pointed out, no matter what our response to the universe may be, the constitution of the world is such that, whether we like it or not, we are to some degree helpless and dependent
in various ways upon realities other than ourselves. The world is such that our very survival demands a certain amount of renunciation, great or small; and more than any other attitude toward life, the religious attitude can enable us to make these renunciations easily and even joyfully.

For when all is said and done, we are in the end absolutely dependent on the universe; and into sacrifices and surrenders of some sort, deliberately looked at and accepted, we are drawn and pressed as into our only permanent positions of repose. Now in those states of mind which fall short of religion, the surrender is submitted to as an imposition of necessity and the sacrifice is undergone at the very best without complaint. In the religious life, on the contrary, surrender and sacrifice are positively espoused: even unnecessary givings-up are added in order that the happiness may increase. Religion thus makes easy and felicitous what in any case is necessary; and if it be the only agency that can accomplish this result, its vital importance as a human faculty stands vindicated beyond dispute. It becomes an essential organ of our life, performing a function which no other portion of our nature can so successfully fulfill.92

Thus, of all the possible responses which man can make to the universe, the religious response not only promises the most happiness, but as James indicated, it makes "easy and felicitous" the adoption of those attitudes and the performance of those actions which in every case are necessary for the individual's survival and the well-being of mankind as a whole. Indeed the feelings of peace and happiness caused by the conversion experience itself may fluctuate from time to time—they may wax and wane alternately. But the one effect of conversion which is fairly lasting and permanent and which best testifies

92 Ibid., p. 56.
to its genuineness is a changed attitude toward life—an attitude which profoundly affects one's mode of living for the better. "the real witness of the spirit to the second birth is to be found only in the disposition of the genuine child of God, the permanently patient heart, the love of self eradicated." Conversion involves a radical change in character—a radical change in one's way of living, in one's way of acting. As James pointed out,

what is attained is often an altogether new level of spiritual vitality, a relatively heroic level, in which impossible things have become possible, and new energies and endurances are shown. The personality is changed, the man is born anew, . . . 'Sanctification' is the technical name of this result. . . .

William James used the term 'saintliness' to describe the most striking qualities of character and action which the conversion experience frequently causes to appear in its subjects. "The collective name for the ripe fruits of religion in a character," he wrote, "is Saintliness. The saintly character is the character for which spiritual emotions are the habitual centre of the personal energy. . . ." This last statement of James requires some explanation. Two things must be made clear: 1) the meaning of the term 'spiritual emotions,' and 2) the sense in which emotions (in this case spiritual emotions) can be called the habitual center of a man's personal energy.

James defined an emotion as the feeling of bodily changes which immediately follow upon the perception of some exciting

93 Ibid., p. 192.
94 Ibid., p. 194.
95 Ibid., pp. 215-16.
thing in the environment or upon the advent of some exciting idea in the mind. Although he did not define the term 'spiritual emotions' for us, the context in which we find it indicates that by 'spiritual emotions,' he meant those emotions which are occasioned by religious experience or by religious ideas in the mind. The deeply religious man, the man who envisions himself and his world to be in the care of God, experiences an enthusiasm, an enchantment, a kind of solemn joy which the non-religious man does not experience. James referred to these feelings variously as religious feelings, spiritual enthusiasms, and, in the quotation with which we are here concerned, spiritual emotions.

To speak of such spiritual emotions as the habitual center of the saint's personal energy may seem to contradict James's earlier statement that the group of ideas to which a man devotes himself and from which he works is "the habitual centre of his personal energy."96 But in fact it does not. For the ability of an idea to capture our attention and to move us to act is due in large measure to the emotional excitement which it occasions in us. Thus we may speak of the emotions occasioned by certain ideas, as well as the ideas themselves, as a center of personal energy. As James pointed out, "where the character, as something distinguished from the intellect, is concerned, the causes of human diversity lie chiefly in our differing susceptibilities of emotional excitement, and in the

96Ibid., p. 162.
different impulses and inhibitions which these bring in their train."

To say that the saint's habitual center of personal energy is spiritual emotions is to say that the aspects of reality upon which his emotional interest habitually centers are the divine aspects. It is to say that the ideas which he finds most exciting are religious ideas. It is to say that the beliefs which warm and quicken him, the beliefs by which he habitually lives and acts are religious beliefs.

James felt that at any given time our moral posture is the result of two sets of forces operative within us—"impulses pushing us one way and obstructions and inhibitions holding us back. 'Yes! yes!' say the impulses; 'No! no!' say the inhibitions." The saintly man is one in whom the inhibitions imposed by such mean affections as selfishness, cowardliness, and hard-heartedness have been swept away by the "expulsive power of a higher affection"—by the power of his spiritual or religious emotions. "There is a pitch of intensity, though, which, if any emotion reach it, enthrones that one as alone effective and sweeps its antagonists and all their inhibitions away." The spiritual emotions of the man who is converted from his wrongness to a life of sanctity have reached that

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97 Ibid., p. 208.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., p. 209.
100 Ibid.
pitch, and the result is a new character decidedly different from the old.

The man who lives in his religious centre of personal energy, and is actuated by spiritual enthusiasms, differs from his previous carnal self in perfectly definite ways. The new ardor which burns in his breast consumes in its glow the lower 'noes' which formerly beset him, and keeps him immune against infection from the entire groveling portion of his nature. Magnanimities once impossible are now easy; paltry conventionalities and mean incentives once tyrannical hold no sway. The stone wall inside of him has fallen, the hardness in his heart has broken down. 101

The features of saintliness are similar in all religions, no matter how different their creeds. The inner feelings of saintly men, for example, everywhere seem much the same. All such men seem to enjoy a sense of being involved in a life that is wider and fuller than that of this world's selfish interest. They experience a conviction of the existence of an Ideal Power—a conviction which is not merely intellectual but which seems to be almost sensible. Furthermore, the saintly man has a "sense of the friendly continuity of the ideal power" 102 with his own life. According to James, this "sense of Presence of a higher and friendly Power seems to be the fundamental feature in the spiritual life." 103 The saintly man willingly surrenders himself to the control of this friendly Power and unites himself to it usually through some form of prayer. And as the limits of his own selfhood break down, as

102 Ibid., p. 217.
103 Ibid., p. 218.
his interests extend beyond himself to include those of the divine in reality (however he conceives it), the saint experiences a tremendous sense of elation and freedom. There is, furthermore, a shifting of his emotional energy away from unfriendly, hostile affections toward loving and harmonious feelings—"towards 'yes, yes,' and away from 'no,' where the claims of the non-ego are concerned." 104

These inner feelings reflect and express themselves outwardly in the saintly man's way of life—a way of life characterized frequently by asceticism, strength, purity, and charity in heroic proportions. The saint's asceticism is a way of immolating himself. As James pointed out,

> The self-surrender may become so passionate as to turn into self-immolation. It may then so overrule the ordinary inhibitions of the flesh that the saint finds positive pleasure in sacrifice and asceticism, measuring and expressing as they do the degree of his loyalty to the higher power. 105

Whether it takes the form of the poverty, chastity, and obedience practiced by persons in religious communities or individual acts of mortification and sacrifice, truly religious asceticism seems to spring from one or the other of two motives. It may, on the one hand, be a form of expiation by which the religious man, acutely conscious of his wrongness, seeks to atone for his sins; on the other hand, ascetical practices may be pure acts of love. They "may appeal to the subject in the light of sacrifices which he is happy in making to the Deity

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104 Ibid., p. 217.
105 Ibid.
whom he acknowledges."106 The saintly man's strength of soul manifests itself in equanimity under all circumstances—in resignation, fortitude, and patience. It is not difficult to understand his strength and tranquillity, for certainly one who is sensibly aware that, no matter what one's difficulties for the moment may be, "one's life as a whole is in the keeping of a power whom one can absolutely trust,"107 cannot help but be at peace.

'A paradise of inward tranquillity' seems to be faith's usual result; and it is easy, even without being religious one's self, to understand this. . . . indeed, how can it possibly fail to steady the nerves, to cool the fever, and appease the fret, if one be sensibly conscious that no matter what one's difficulties for the moment may appear to be, one's life as a whole is in the keeping of a power whom one can absolutely trust? In deeply religious men the abandonment of self to this power is passionate. Whoever not only says, but feels, 'God's will be done,' is mailed against every weakness; and the whole historic array of martyrs, missionaries, and religious reformers is there to prove the tranquil-mindedness, under naturally agitating or distressing circumstances, which self-surrender brings.108

While the saint is always tranquil and at peace, however, he is nevertheless so sensitive to spiritual discords that he works tirelessly to purify his life; "the cleansing of existence from brutal and sensual elements becomes imperative."109 But, although he may be hard upon himself, purifying his own life by mortification and asceticism, the saint is never hard on

106 Ibid., p. 234.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid., p. 217.
others; rather he exhibits an extraordinary tenderness and charity for all of his fellow-men—even for his enemies and for the most personally loathsome of creatures. Such are the inner dispositions and the outward qualities of character and conduct most typical of the man who sees this visible world as pregnant with the divine. Such is the religious response to the universe in its highest form.

In summary, we can say that religion involves thought (creed), feelings and action. And in almost every religious creed we can find the general vision of the world described earlier in the chapter—the view that this world is but an aspect of a more spiritual world, that in this more spiritual world there exist divine powers who care for us and for our ideals, that these powers are powers with whom we can communicate and keep in touch and from whom we can get help through prayer and self-surrender. Almost all religions agree in this general view of reality. Whatever the doctrinal differences which distinguish one creed from another, they are but secondary accretions to this central belief. Such secondary beliefs, James held, are elaborations by the intellect along lines suggested by a man's feelings, needs, and desires. It is the feelings which are primary and essential, James said; for it is the feelings which are relatively permanent and basically the same in all religions.

Among the religious feelings examined, one can distinguish between those from which the religious vision springs and those which accompany it and often remain as its more or
less permanent effects. The feelings which give rise to religion, as already indicated, are the feelings of wrongness, need, and want. The feelings, on the other hand, which result from the religious conversion and which accompany the religious vision have been characterized by James as "an excitement of the cheerful, expansive, 'dynamogenic' order which, like any tonic, freshens our vital powers."\textsuperscript{110} Adopting the phrase used by Professor Leuba, James called this kind of excitement the 'faith state.' As James put it, religion adds to life, in spite of life's hardships and sufferings, a certain "enchantment which is not rationally or logically deducible from anything else."\textsuperscript{111} As indicated above, James felt that if religion means anything definite for us, it ought to mean "this added dimension of emotion, this enthusiastic temper of espousal, in regions where morality strictly so called can at best but bow its head and acquiesce."\textsuperscript{112}

There is much more to religion than thought and feeling, however, for these inevitably resolve themselves into action--into a mode of living more or less saintly--a mode of living involving devotion, asceticism, purity, patience, fortitude, courage, charity, sacrifice, generosity, mercy, and all the qualities which mankind has always considered most admirable. In \textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience}, James gave us a

\textsuperscript{110}Ibid., p. 381.
\textsuperscript{111}Ibid., p. 54.
\textsuperscript{112}Ibid. See above, pp. 180-81.
description of the man who possesses a sense of the divine--

a vivid awareness of the presence of God.

Whoever possesses strongly this sense comes naturally
to think that the smallest details of this world derive
infinite significance from their relation to an unseen
divine order. The thought of this order yields him a
superior denomination of happiness, and a steadfast-
ness of soul with which no other can compare. In social
relations his serviceability is exemplary; he abounds
in impulses to help. His help is inward as well as
outward, for his sympathy reaches souls as well as bod-
ies, and kindles unsuspected faculties therein. Instead
of placing happiness where common men place it, in
comfort, he places it in a higher kind of inner excite-
ment, which converts discomforts into sources of cheer
and annuls unhappiness. So he turns his back upon no
duty, however thankless; and when we are in need of
assistance, we can count upon the saint lending his
hand with more certainty than we can count upon any
other person. Finally, his humble-mindedness and his
ascetic tendencies save him from the petty personal
pretensions which so obstruct our ordinary social
intercourse, and his purity gives us in him a clean
man for a companion. Felicity, purity, charity, patience,
self-severity,--these are splendid excellencies, and
the saint of all men shows them in the completest pos-
sible measure.113

Such excellencies are indispensable to the world's welfare.

If all men possessed such virtues, we would have an ideal so-

ciety. Obviously all men do not possess such virtues, how-

ever, and our society is far from ideal. Nevertheless, because

some men of this calibre do exist, the world is better off than

it would otherwise be. Not only do these men sacrifice them-
selves daily for God and their fellow-men--trying to alleviate

pain and to bring peace and harmony to the world--but by their

example, they often inspire others to live more humanly and

thus contribute to the perfection of mankind as a whole. Men

113 Ibid., pp. 285-86.
of saintly character, by their example, function as "a leaven of righteousness in the world"\textsuperscript{114} and draw it in "the direction of more prevalent habits of saintliness."\textsuperscript{115} William James believed that because religion thus enables the individual himself to live more happily and fruitfully (whatever personal misfortunes befall him) and at the same time benefits the world at large insofar as the world is made what it is by the lives of men, the religious response to the universe is the best response that men can make. In James's opinion, since the consequences for the individual and for the world as a whole are good, religion itself is good.

Whatever salutary effects religion may have upon individuals and upon the world at large, however, the Intellectualists of James's day insisted that unless the truth of the religious vision can be established beyond the shadow of a doubt by empirical proof or rational demonstration, religious belief cannot be justified. For the positivists and rationalists of James's time, the good or bad consequences of religion were irrelevant. The real issue was the truth or falsity of its view of the world. And if the truth of that view could not be established, they said, one ought not accept it however useful its consequences might be.

In championing religious belief, however, William James himself was not indifferent to the truth or falsity of reli-

\textsuperscript{114}Ibid., p. 290.

\textsuperscript{115}Ibid.
region's claims; James was as much concerned with discovering
the truth as the next man—perhaps even more so. He certainly
did not give his approval to any view of life which was patently
false simply because it had salutary effects upon society.
For James, the religious interpretation of the world is clearly
indicated by human experience. Furthermore, as the reader
will discover in Chapter VI, the religious interpretation of
the world is, from James's point of view, the most rational
interpretation possible.
CHAPTER VI

THE RATIONAL AND EMPIRICAL GROUNDS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

The Intellectualists, as James called those thinkers of his time who made sense and reason the sole arbiters of truth, insisted that man can lawfully believe only propositions which have been empirically verified or logically demonstrated. Forbidding man to accept any hypothesis about which doubt is at all possible, they enjoined him to suspend judgment until proof can be had. James agreed that in some areas of discourse, such an attitude may be the wisest one to adopt. But in others, he felt that to wait for proof may be to wait for the impossible; for there are some hypotheses which empirical science and logic are powerless to prove. Moreover, these disciplines provide no solution to the problem a man faces when immediate action is demanded but evidence as to the right course of action is not forthcoming.

Our purpose in this chapter will be to consider in detail James's reflections upon the question of the truth of religion and his efforts to defend and justify religious faith in the face of the Intellectualists' prohibitions. Special attention will be given to James's position that the foundations of religious belief are both rational and empirical. James maintained that the religious view of the universe, although not
susceptible to logical demonstration, is nevertheless the most rational view of the universe possible. Moreover, he held that religion is solidly grounded in experience—not in the sense that experience can prove the truth of religion for everyone, but in the sense that it clearly points in that direction.

William James was well aware of the fact that neither science nor philosophy has thus far succeeded in establishing the truth of any religious creed. However, he believed that religious hypotheses are of the sort for which science and logic do not provide adequate criteria. In fact, in his view, religious questions in the strict sense fall outside the scope of their methods.

Science, for example, operates only in the sensible world and recognizes only data accessible to the senses, either directly or through the intermediary of a screening device, as valid evidence in any issue. It seeks to verify its hypotheses by experiments performed on the empirical world and looks for corroboration in facts equally sensible. The unseen world of religious belief, James said, of its very nature simply does not lend itself to this kind of experimentation or verification. Although science operates by postulation and guesswork, even these must be either directly verified or indirectly so, i.e., there must be some kind of agreement between them and other verified facts.

Similarly, James pointed out, philosophy, using logical demonstration as its tool, can expect no more success in the area of religious belief than science. For centuries, most
philosophers have attempted to ground religious belief in reason. Some have tried to deduce religion's hypotheses from seemingly indubitable self-evident principles in an effort to make religion the creation of pure reason totally independent of experience. Others have tried to show that religion is the product of reason drawing rigorous inference from objective facts. William James, however, believed that all such attempts have failed; for if religion's propositions were the genuine products of pure reason, or logical reason operating upon objective facts, then philosophy ought be able to convince men universally of religion's truth. But as a matter of history, it has been notoriously unsuccessful in this regard.

Furthermore, James felt that the content of the religious hypothesis is such that logic alone is not capable of establishing its reality and ought not be expected to do so. The facts postulated by religion are put forth as particular and concrete; the divine is described as a reality which is concrete, individual, and indeed unique. Conceptual processes, however, deal with things abstractly; they classify, define, and interpret facts already given. But they cannot produce the concrete facts themselves or reveal them to us in the first place, because in the concrete there is always a 'plus,' a 'thisness' which conceptual processes cannot capture or represent—"a plus, a thisness, which feeling alone can answer for."¹ For this reason, it is futile to try to demonstrate logically,

¹James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 346.
i.e., by a purely intellectual process, any particular concre­te fact, let alone the concrete facts posited by religious belief. Deductive logic seems to be impotent in this area. For in any strictly valid syllogism of a categorical type, the terms of the premises must be abstract, and consequently the conclusion must be abstract also. Indeed, in certain cases it may be foolish not to proceed from the abstract conclusion to a judgment regarding the concrete; but the movement of the mind from an abstract conclusion to a concrete judgment is a move­ment made under the influence of man's volitional power. The judgment of fact is not forced upon one by the logic of the abstract argument, however persuasive it may be. Logic alone, in the sense of purely intellectual processes dealing with abstract concepts, cannot prove any concrete fact, religious or otherwise, and should not attempt to do so.

However, while science and logic cannot prove the reli­gious hypothesis, neither can they disprove it. Neither one nor the other can tell us that the unseen world of religious belief is not real; for except in the case of an idea which is intrinsically contradictory, neither science nor logic can tell us what does not exist. Thus, the religious vision of the world is not susceptible to proof or disproof at the hands of either science or philosophy.

Nevertheless, the theistic, or religious, interpretation of the universe is, in the opinion of William James, the most rational interpretation possible. Of all the ways of inter­preting the world, James believed that theism is the most
rational in the sense that it, above all others, is most congruous with man's nature. It alone, he claimed, satisfies every mental need in strictly proper measure. 2

James said that only a being defined as God is usually defined can satisfy the mental needs of a man who is looking for something in which to ground reality. A God is the only kind of being which "would form the most adequate possible object for minds framed like our own to conceive as lying at the root of the universe." 3 Stating his position in more emphatic terms, James wrote:

My thesis, in other words, is this: that some outward reality of a nature defined as God's nature must be defined, is the only ultimate object that is at the same time rational and possible for the human mind's contemplation. Anything short of God is not rational, anything more than God is not possible... 4

To understand this last statement, one must consider what James meant by God—how he defined the nature of the only object that a man can rationally conceive to lie at the root of things. In the essay, "Reflex Action and Theism," he described its essential features for us:

First, it is essential that God be conceived as the deepest power in the universe; and, second, he must be conceived under the form of a mental personality. The personality need not be determined intrinsically any

2 An idea or theory is rational if it satisfies the requirements of man's three-fold mental powers—receptive, theoretic, and volitional—and thus facilitates unimpeded mental functioning. See above, pp. 98-105.


4 Ibid., pp. 115-16.
further than is involved in the holding of certain things dear, and in the recognition of our dispositions toward those things, the things themselves being all good and righteous things. But, extrinsically considered, so to speak, God's personality is to be regarded, like any other personality, as something lying outside of my own and other than me, and whose existence I simply come upon and find. A power not ourselves, then, which not only makes for righteousness, but means it, and which recognizes us,—such is the definition which I think nobody will be inclined to dispute. . . . In whatever other respects the divine personality may differ from ours or may resemble it, the two are consanguineous at least in this,—that both have purposes for which they care, and each can hear the other's call.5

Such are the features of the God, which, James said, is "the normal object of the mind's belief."6 Given the triadic structure of the human mind, anything less than this is not rational and anything more than this is not possible. We shall consider first, and in some detail, the inadequacy and consequent irrationality of a theory in which anything less than God is considered to be the ultimate reality at the root of the universe; secondly, we shall consider the impossibility of conceiving anything more than God as the ground of all things.

As noted in Chapter III, William James held that the powers of the human mind are three-fold. They consist of 1) a receptive faculty by which impressions are received from without, 2) a theoretic or speculative faculty which defines and interprets the nature of the impressing objects, and 3) a volitional power, by which we actively respond to the reality received by the senses and interpreted by the theoretic

5Ibid., p. 122.
6Ibid., p. 116.
faculty. This latter faculty, i.e., the conceptual and reasoning power, has as its purpose to define the direction which our activity, immediate and remote, shall take. But the response of the active or volitional part of our nature is not simply a spontaneous reaction following automatically upon thought. On the contrary, our volitional faculty exercises a certain rule over thought; it has a critical function. It can accept or reject the formulas proposed by our theoretical power, and whether it accepts or rejects them depends upon whether it finds thought's formulas consonant with itself or not. A theory may be in harmony with the deliverances of sense (including the data provided by past experience) and the requirements of reason, but it will be accepted by us only if it is also congruous with our active powers--with our desires, aspirations, and propensities--and provides them with objects upon which to react in the most felicitous manner. A theory can be said to be rational only if it satisfies all three 'departments' of the human mind, and the final word, in James's opinion, comes from the active or willing 'department' of man's nature. Any theory which disappoints our active powers and gives them nothing for which to care and act will be rejected even though it is logically consistent and harmonizes with perceptual facts.

When the speculative department of the human mind undertakes to interpret the character, not just of one or two sensibly perceived objects, but of the totality of such objects, when, in other words, it undertakes to interpret the character of the universe as a whole, various philosophical views emerge
as possible explanations and offer themselves to man's active nature for espousal or rejection. Theism, atheistic materialism, and agnosticism are but some of the results of reason's efforts to interpret experience. Materialism and agnosticism, James believed, are the least acceptable of the three because they disappoint man's active powers. Even though they are accepted by many, these philosophical theories cannot universally prevail because they provide inadequate stimuli for man's practical nature. Man cannot feel volitionally at home in them.

As James pointed out, every man desires to be adequate to the demands of the universe, to contribute actively to its development, to play his part in the drama of life. But man's nature is such that his ability to perform is sustained and inhibited to a great extent by his emotional states. Feelings and emotions of a positive and expansive nature, such as courage, admiration, enthusiasm, hope, rapture, and the like, have a stimulating effect upon man and enable him to act with vigor and zest. On the other hand, negative attitudes and feelings—fear, doubt, despair, sadness, and frustration, for example—have a deadening effect upon man's active powers and leave him apathetic, indifferent, and often powerless to do what life demands of him. The philosophies of materialism and agnosticism occasion only such negative feelings in man.

In opposing philosophical materialism, James was careful to point out that it does not necessarily involve a belief in 'matter' as a metaphysical principle. "One may deny matter in that sense, as strongly as Berkeley did, one may be a phenomen-
alist like Huxley, and yet one may still be a materialist in the wider sense, of explaining higher phenomena by lower ones, and leaving the destinies of the world at the mercy of its blinder parts and forces." It is materialism in this wider sense that is opposed to spiritualism, or theism. Spiritualism, or theism, claims that mental and moral powers, rather than blind physio-chemical forces, run the universe and that, ultimately, mental and moral powers superior to man's are in control. Materialism, on the other hand, claims that it is the laws of physical nature which run things. In a materialistic world, then, all of man's efforts to fashion the world for the better by his actions, all of his efforts to develop it along lines suggested by his ideals, hopes, and aspirations are pointless. For no matter what man tries to accomplish, the blind forces of physical nature will finally determine the result. Indeed in the world of materialism, man's volitional powers have no relevant function. His active propensities--his desire to have an active part in the world's development--his desire to contribute creatively to its perfection--these are all without meaning.

In his work, Pragmatism, William James was critical of the materialism of Herbert Spencer in particular. According to Spencer's theory of mechanical evolution, every state of being, both mental and physical, is subject to the same laws of evolution and dissolution. Everything develops from a relatively

7James, Pragmatism and Four Essays from The Meaning of Truth, p. 69.
primitive stage, in which only elementary functions are performed, to a state in which more complicated functions arise. But this evolutionary process of development does not result in any permanent state of maturity and perfection. On the contrary, everything that evolves, without exception, is destined to dissolve again, so that the end of everything is destruction. Man is born, matures, and dies. A society begins, develops, and is finally destroyed. Whatever good and beautiful things evolve will one and all be dissolved again. As James put it, "according to the theory of mechanical evolution, the laws of redistribution of matter and motion, though they are certainly to thank for all the good hours which our organisms have ever yielded us and for all the ideals which our minds now frame, are yet fatally certain to undo their work again, and to redissolve everything that they have once evolved." Thus the theory of mechanical evolution promises man nothing but destruction—not only his own destruction but also the eventual dissolution of all the things he cherishes and the complete annihilation of all the ideals which he loves and strives for. Such a theory renders all of man's expansive emotions of love, hope, joy, and courage totally subjective and without any real objects and thus leaves him little about which to care and nothing for which to live and act.

A nameless unheimlichkeit comes over us at the thought of there being nothing eternal in our final purposes, in the objects of those loves and aspirations which

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8 Ibid., pp. 75-76.
are our deepest energies... Small as we are, minute as is the point by which the cosmos impinges upon each one of us, each one desires to feel that his reaction at that point is congruous with the demands of the vast whole—that he balances the latter, so to speak, and is able to do what it expects of him. But as his abilities to do lie wholly in the line of his natural propensities; as he enjoys reacting with such emotions as fortitude, hope, rapture, admiration, earnestness, and the like; and he very unwillingly reacts with fear, disgust, despair, or doubt—a philosophy which should only legitimate emotions of the latter sort would be sure to leave the mind a prey to discontent and craving. 9

Agnosticism, too, although it does not issue the same dogmatic denials that materialism does, inflicts man with a kind of apathy. Agnosticism claims that man cannot know what the universe ultimately is or what life is ultimately all about. The agnostic claims that man cannot know whether or not there is more at work in the world than blind physical forces, that man cannot know whether or not there is a God who cares for him and his ideals. From the agnostic point of view, it is not possible to know whether there are any values which are everlasting or whether all are subject to dissolution as the mechanical evolutionists claim. But to be in doubt about these things is to be in doubt about how to act. Action, after all, presupposes conviction. Not knowing what life is all about leaves one not knowing how to live. Not knowing what the universe is leaves one not knowing how to react to it. Not knowing whether or not one's active efforts can ever produce any lasting results in the way of goodness and beauty leaves one

with no inspiration to act constructively and creatively at all and permits one to make mere escape from suffering his rule of life. From James's point of view, agnosticism, as such, offers man no motives for the fruitful exercise of his active powers; and, like materialism, it leaves him restless and unsatisfied.

Obviously, then, however logically consistent philosophies like materialism and agnosticism may prove to be, however they may harmonize with perceived facts, they are, from the point of view of William James, not rational; for they do not satisfy the practical side of human nature. They may indeed appeal at certain times to certain people; but, James pointed out, no philosophy which does not make "a direct appeal to all those powers of our nature which we hold in highest esteem" will be deemed rational by all men at all times.

Materialism and agnosticism, even were they true, could never gain universal and popular acceptance; for they both, alike, give a solution of things which is irrational to the practical third of our nature, and in which we can never volitionally feel at home. Each comes out of the second or theoretic stage of mental functioning, with its definition of the essential nature of things, its formula of formulas prepared. The whole array of active forces of our nature stands waiting, impatient for the word which shall tell them how to discharge themselves most deeply and worthily upon life. "Well!" cry they, "what shall we do?" "Ignoramus, ignorabimus!" says agnosticism. "React upon atoms and their concussions!" says materialism. What a collapse! The mental train misses fire, the middle fails to ignite the end, the cycle breaks down halfway to its conclusion; and the active powers left alone, with no proper object on which to vent their energy, must either atrophy, sicken, and die, or else by their

10 Ibid., p. 110.
pent-up convulsions and excitement keep the whole ma-
achinery in a fever until some less incommensurable
solution, some more practically rational formula, shall
provide a normal issue for the currents of the soul.11

It was James's conviction that the only interpretation of
reality that can satisfy all three departments of the human
mind is theism. Theism, he felt, is the most practically
rational of all world views; it offers the most reasonable
solution to the problem of how to interpret the universe.

Now, theism always stands ready with the most
practically rational solution it is possible to con-
ceive. Not an energy of our active nature to which
it does not authoritatively appeal, not an emotion
of which it does not normally and naturally release
the springs.12

Theism legitimizes our higher emotions of admiration, courage,
hope, and rapture by giving us a God who cares for and works
for the same values as we—a God with whom we can cooperate in
making the world better—a God who will guarantee that the
cherished ideals for which we work and suffer will somehow be
preserved. Thus theism makes our moral life more than a mere
day to day struggle with evil; it makes it a glorious adven-
ture, a kind of holy war fought for divine stakes. James felt
that a theistic interpretation of life is incompatible with
pessimism. And indeed if divine powers are working with us to
realize that which is good and beautiful, we cannot help but
be optimistic about the ultimate outcome of life. Whatever
evils may exist now, however bad things may appear to be at

11 James, "Reflex Action and Theism," Essays on Faith and
Morals, pp. 126-27.

12 Ibid., p. 127.
present, we have hope that the future will be better. Certainly, knowing that however adverse our lives may be here and now, our efforts will someday bear fruit, if not in this visible world then in some unseen spiritual realm, cannot fail to make even the most difficult and painful life seem worth living in an unqualified sense.

By the standards of William James, then, the theistic interpretation of reality is indeed the most rational view possible, satisfying the requirements of all three departments of man's mind. It satisfies the demands of our receptive faculty insofar as it does not contradict, and is therefore in harmony with, the data of sense experience even though it may not be experimentally verified. Furthermore, while it may not be logically demonstrable, it is nevertheless logically consistent and to this extent satisfies the requirements of our theoretic power. But most important of all, theism, more than any other theory advanced to explain reality, is, as we have seen, congruent with the active part of our nature. On the other hand, any theory which posits anything less than God as "lying at the root of the universe" stifles our active powers and is for this reason irrational from a practical point of view.

While grounding reality in anything less than God is not rational, to explain the universe in terms of anything more than God is not possible, James said. What James meant by a

\[13\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 115.}\]
ground for reality which would be more than God is not immediately evident. However, he seems to have had in mind the monistic Absolute of the Idealists. In his essay, "Reflex Action and Theism," he used the term gnosticism to refer to the theory that intellect is somehow the supreme reality. Not only is it the supreme reality in the theory of gnosticism, but ultimately it is the only reality; for appearances notwithstanding, it is in the last analysis identical with its objects which include all things. For the gnostic, or the Absolute Idealist, there is but one reality, i.e., an absolute Mind, which is ultimately identical with all the things which appear to be other than it—with all finite minds, for example, and with all merely human powers, sensory, intellectual, and volitional. In Chapter II, we saw several of the objections which James raised against gnosticism, there referred to as Monism or Absolute Idealism. But here we shall consider an argument to which James gave special attention in "Reflex Action and Theism"—an argument which is in some sense related to his argument that materialism and agnosticism are not rational. Materialism and agnosticism are not rational, James said, because they do not satisfy all three 'departments' of man's nature—receptive, cognitive (theoretical), and volitional; they are not congruent with the triadic structure of man's mind. Gnosticism, on the other hand, in effect denies the triadic structure of the human mind. Gnosticism is not possible, James held, because it presupposes the identification of powers which are obviously distinct. By making intellect, or
cognitive power, the supreme reality and identifying it with all that it knows, gnosticism does away with the experienced distinctions between the sensory, speculative, and volitional powers in man. Such an identification and such a deification of cognition, James pointed out, is contrary to the whole drift of ordinary human experience as well as to the findings of physiology and psychology.  

From its first dawn to its highest actual attainment, we find that the cognitive faculty, where it appears to exist at all, appears but as one element in an organic mental whole, and as a minister to higher mental powers,—the powers of will. Such a thing as its emancipation and absolution from these organic relations receives no faintest color of plausibility from any fact we can discern. Arising as a part, in a mental and objective world which are both larger than itself, it must, whatever its powers of growth may be (and I am far from wishing to disparage them), remain a part to the end. This is the character of the cognitive element in all the mental life we know, and we have no reason to suppose that that character will ever change. On the contrary, it is more than probable that to the end of time our power of moral and volitional response to the nature of things will be the deepest organ of communication therewith we shall ever possess.  

In the thought of William James, therefore, the only interpretation of reality which is at the same time both rational and possible is theism. And by theism, James meant that view of life and reality which posits as the deepest power in the universe, a mental personality distinct from, though not

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14 James felt that his doctrine of the triadic structure of the mind was in perfect harmony with the physiologists' generalization that all action is somehow reflex action, i.e., that every action has its origin in some impression of sense which, after some intermediary cerebral activity, expresses itself in action of one kind or another.

totally unlike, our own—a personality with whom we can enter into friendly communication and with whom we can cooperate in the attainment of mutually cherished ideals of righteousness and beauty.

The theistic view of the world, however, is not only the most practically rational interpretation of reality in the view of William James; it is moreover firmly rooted in human experience. This does not mean that it can be verified by any kind of controlled experiment which will render it evident to all men. But history reveals that there have been human experiences which, while they do not prove God's existence to all people, nevertheless point to theism's truth and vitiate the prohibitions which rationalists and positivists alike have laid upon religious belief.

Indeed, there are no objective data accessible to all men which will make the unseen world of religion evident to everyone; there are no sensible facts which will render it an object available for scientific testing. But throughout the history of man there have been a great many private facts, private personal experiences which, for those who have had them, have made God's existence, or the existence of unseen powers, as unquestioned a fact as their own being. Such experiences can generally be called mystical. Although we are inclined to think of only a few renowned saints and celebrated spiritual writers as mystics, there is evidence that there have been many persons who have had a kind of direct awareness of the reality of the divine—an awareness which, however
vague, can be called a mystical awareness. For these people, belief in the unseen world is as spontaneous and unquestioning as any man's immediate belief in an object sensibly present to him.

The fact of such experiences inclined James to believe that man possesses, in addition to the external senses, a special sense whose proper object is present reality whether that reality is accessible to the external senses or not. This special sense, James said, must somehow be stimulated if man is to accept anything as presently real. James felt that the fact that many people possess non-sensible "objects of their belief, not in the form of mere conceptions which their intellect accepts as true, but rather in the form of quasi-sensible realities directly apprehended"\(^\text{16}\) points to the reality of this power. Such phenomena, he said, suggest that the awareness of present realities is the work not of the external senses (although these are certainly involved when the realities perceived are sensible realities) but of a special reality-discerning sense which can be stimulated obviously by sensible objects but also by non-sensible objects, including ideas and, for all we know, realities which are neither sensible nor the ideal products of our minds.

It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call 'something there,' more deep and more general than any of the special and particular 'senses' by which the current psychology

\(^{16}\text{James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 65.}\)
supposes existent realities to be originally revealed. If this were so, we might suppose the senses to waken our attitudes and conduct as they so habitually do, by first exciting this sense of reality; but anything else, any idea, for example, that might similarly excite it, would have that same prerogative of appearing real which objects of sense normally possess. So far as religious conceptions were able to touch this reality-feeling, they would be believed in in spite of criticism, even though they might be so vague and remote as to be almost unimaginable...17

Documented cases of persons who at one time or another have vividly experienced the reality of non-sensible objects, religious and otherwise, James said, seem to prove the existence of this reality-discerning power. In James's own words, "Such cases, ... seem sufficiently to prove the existence in our mental machinery of a sense of present reality more diffused and general than that which our special senses yield."18

James's theory that man possesses a special faculty of this type raises the obvious question of how such a sense fits into his theory of the human mind as triadic in structure. Since James referred to this special reality-discerning power as a sense, i.e., a receptive power, one is inclined to think that he considered it an aspect of what he called the 'feeling department' of the mind. But while it seems to be in the same 'department' with the other senses and while it can be stimulated by the things which stimulate the other senses, it can apparently be activated also by ideas, which are products of the 'conceiving department' of the mind, as

17Ibid., pp. 61-62.
18Ibid., p. 65.
well as by realities which are neither sensible nor purely ideal. James’s position on this question is not entirely clear, however; and therefore the precise relationship of the reality-discerning sense to the three 'departments' of the human mind in his theory remains a matter of speculation.

Whatever the precise character of man's sense of reality may be, any direct, quasi-sensible awareness of God's reality, any feeling of his presence, can be called a mystical experience at least in the broad sense of the term. It is mystical in contrast with what psychologists would consider the natural ways of knowing a thing's reality—i.e., direct intuition by the external senses and logical inference from intuited facts. Mystical experience in the strictest sense of the term, however, is generally thought to have certain distinguishing characteristics. Four of them, viz., ineffability, the quality of being noetic, transiency, and passivity, James called to our attention in The Varieties of Religious Experience.

A mystical experience is ineffable in the sense that it defies expression; it is incommunicable. Its quality, or its object, so to speak, must be directly intuited just as a sensible object is intuited, for it can no more be communicated to another person than a sensation can.

In this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect. No one can make clear to another who has never had a certain feeling, in what the quality or worth of it consists. One must have musical ears to know the value of a symphony; one must have been in love one's self to understand a lover's state of mind. Lacking the heart or ear, we cannot interpret the musician
or the lover justly, and are even likely to consider him weak-minded or absurd. The mystic finds that most of us accord to his experiences an equally incompetent treatment.19

On the other hand, although a mystical experience may resemble a state of feeling, it is experienced as a kind of knowing. Genuine mystical states

are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time.20

Thus a mystical experience is a cognitive experience, but the knowledge acquired is such that it cannot be expressed in words.21

19 Ibid., p. 293.
20 Ibid.
21 James cited the testimony of St. John of the Cross on this point. St. John said that God compenetrates the soul, but in such a way that the soul "finds no terms, no means, no comparison whereby to render the sublimity of the wisdom and the delicacy of the spiritual feeling with which she is filled. . . . We receive this mystical knowledge of God clothed in none of the kinds of images, in none of the sensible representations, which our mind makes use of in other circumstances. Accordingly in this knowledge, since the senses and the imagination are not employed, we get neither form nor impression, nor can we give any account or furnish any likeness, although the mysterious and sweet-tasting wisdom comes home so clearly to the innermost parts of our soul. Fancy a man seeing a certain kind of thing for the first time in his life. He can understand it, use and enjoy it, but he cannot apply a name to it, nor communicate any idea of it, even though all the while it be a mere thing of sense. How much greater will be his powerlessness when it goes beyond the senses! This is the peculiarity of the divine language. The more infused, intimate, spiritual, and supersensible it is, the more does it exceed the senses, both inner and outer, and impose silence upon them." (The Dark Night of the Soul, book ii, ch. xvii, quoted in James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, pp. 312-13.)
In addition to being ineffable and noetic, mystical states are usually relatively transient; they cannot as a rule be sustained for long periods of time. However, there have been individuals who have testified to having an enduring sense, a comparatively permanent feeling, of the divine presence—a feeling which, since it could not be accounted for as an instance of external sensation, would have to be considered mystical, at least in the broad sense of the term.

Finally, the subject of a mystical transport seems to be relatively passive especially in states which are mystical in the more technical sense of the word. James conceded that the oncoming of the experience may be facilitated by preliminary actions which may be deliberate—actions such as fixing one's attention, assuming a certain bodily posture, and ascetical practices of one kind or another. But "when the characteristic sort of consciousness once has set in, the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power." 22 Such a suspension of one's own powers may be absent in those experiences which are called mystical only in the broad sense. But that it is typical of the experience of mystics in the narrow sense of the term is apparent from their own testimony. James quoted Saint Teresa of Avila on this point: "Thus does God, when he raises a soul to union with himself, suspend the natural action of all her faculties. She neither sees, hears, nor

22 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 293.
understands, so long as she is united with God."²³

Of all the qualities thought to be typical of mystical transports, however, the most characteristic is its incommunicableness. Mystical truth exists only for the person who has the experience, not for anyone else. And for the individuals who have them, mystical states, "when well developed, usually are, and have the right to be, absolutely authoritative."²⁴

On the other hand, mystical states have no authority over those who do not experience them. They do not impose upon the non-mystic any obligation to accept their revelations uncritically. Nevertheless, James pointed out, the experiences of the mystics serve to break down the absolute authority which positivists and rationalists claim for sense and reason. Mystical insight shows that consciousness based upon the senses and natural understanding alone is not the only kind of consciousness. It indicates the possibility of other realms of truth "in which, so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith."²⁵ As James aptly put it, "the existence of mystical states absolutely overthrows the pretension of non-mystical states to be the sole and ultimate dictators of what we may believe."²⁶

²³The Interior Castle, Fifth Abode, ch. i, quoted in James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 314.
²⁴James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 323.
²⁵Ibid., p. 324.
²⁶Ibid., p. 327.
The mystic's experience is invulnerable as far as the attacks of the Intellectualists are concerned, for no one can question another man's experience. If a man claims to experience God's presence, who can say that he does not? Furthermore, it is useless to argue him out of his conviction, for mystical experiences are as much direct perceptions of fact for the religious mystic as our sensations are for us. They are face to face presentations of what seems immediately to exist.27

James concluded that while the experiences of religious mystics do not prove God's existence or the reality of an unseen spiritual world for all men, they nevertheless vitiate the denials of rationalists and positivists and permanently undermine their pretensions to any exclusive franchise on truth. James felt that mystical experience opens the way for those of us not gifted with mystical revelations to accept God on faith alone if such belief presents itself to us as salutary and advantageous and if it is in agreement with the triadic structure of our minds.

However, it is not only the mystic's religious belief which is empirically grounded. On the contrary, even in the

27From the point of view of the mystic, what is immediately revealed to him, while unutterable, is nevertheless a directly perceived and unquestionable fact. And from his point of view, his belief in it cannot be called faith because his mind is coerced by the apparent evidence. Furthermore, although in regard to ordinary perceptual data, which at the moment experienced is indubitable, doubt is possible later when one reflects upon his own fallibility, mystical experience carries with it a certain authority which uniquely leaves it unquestioned even when it is reflected upon at a later date.
religious creed of the non-mystic, there is, James said, a minimum content known by experience. This minimum content may be nothing more than the awareness of being wrong, of being in need, of longing for deliverance; or it may be the experience of help or consolation flowing in from without following prayer or communion with some power thought to be external.

In the view of William James, all religious belief is grounded in experience of some kind—either in mystical transports or in the non-mystic's experience of need and desire. And the objects which a religious person, mystic or non-mystic, experiences directly and thus believes are not technically matters of faith for him. The presence of God directly experienced by the mystic, for example, the need for help and the reception of help on the part of the non-mystic—these are empirical facts for them. And their belief insofar as it extends only to these items is not faith in the technical sense of the term.

Religious belief, however, does not stop at such minimum content. The intellect speculates upon the nature of the divine presence which may be directly perceived in a mystical transport or upon the nature of the power from which help comes in the case of the non-mystic in need of deliverance. While experience points to the nature of the reality in question in both cases, the nature of the divine reality is not clearly and fully revealed by any experience, mystical or otherwise. And thus, beliefs concerning the divine nature take on the
aspect of faith. James calls them over-beliefs. They are beliefs which outstrip the empirical data; they go beyond the evidence provided by experience but always in the direction indicated by experience. Their objects are the objects of religious faith in its more technical sense.

But while these non-empirical details of one's religious creed, these theological formulations, are not matters of direct experience, they are somehow rooted in experienced human needs. For the intellect develops its theological formulas along lines suggested by its own propensities. Each man fashions his God and builds out his religion in directions prescribed by his own temperament and by his emotional, volitional, and intellectual wants. Experience, as it were, provides the fundamental, but bare, outline; but the intellect fills in the empty spaces and completes the picture along lines suggested by the individual's needs and personal sensibilities. Thus, the intellect produces a creed consisting of experienced facts and over-beliefs—a creed that is consonant with the individual's life-style. 28

It is with the religious man's over-beliefs that Intellectualists are most likely to quarrel. If a man feels in need of help, if he feels that there is something wrong about him and that he needs to be delivered from his wrongness, they

28 Of course, not every individual religious believer constructs the creed to which he subscribes all by himself. Indeed, it may have been handed down to him by others. But his acceptance of that particular creed with its specific over-beliefs in preference to another is determined by that creed's harmony with his own intellectual, emotional, and volitional constitution.
cannot deny his feelings. If a man experiences help, relief or consolation, they cannot question the fact although they may argue about the source of the consolation or about its significance. As James pointed out, the fact that a religious person is conscious of being continuous with a 'More' of the same quality through which saving experiences come is "a positive content of religious experience which ... is literally and objectively true." 29 But the exact nature of the 'More' and the nature of a man's relationship to it are the questions which, when answered by various theologians, result in the diversified creeds with which we are familiar.

James suggested that the 'More' with which the religious man experiences himself to be in touch is the subconscious continuation of himself, the subliminal or 'transmarginal' area of his own consciousness; but he also suggested that this subliminal self is in contact with still another 'More' that is supernatural in character. "Let me then propose, as an hypothesis, that whatever it may be on its farther side, the 'more' with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected is on its hither side the subconscious continuation of our conscious life." 30 Indeed, whether the help we receive following prayer comes from a superhuman being or not, James said, it enters into our consciousness through the door of our subconscious. Atheists and naturalists, of course, would say

29 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 388.
30 Ibid., p. 386.
that the subconscious is the highest source of this help and that beyond the subconscious there is nothing, i.e., nothing supernatural. The religious believer, on the other hand, would say that beyond himself, beyond his conscious and subconscious self, there is till a 'More'—a superhuman kind of conscious reality with which at the outermost limits of his being he is in contact and from which help comes.

James felt that when we ask what the 'More' is on its remoter side, when we ask just how far our transmarginal consciousness carries us, where it terminates and what is beyond it, we are in the area of over-beliefs. We are asking questions which experience and logical reason cannot definitively answer. And whatever beliefs we accept regarding this 'More' on its remoter side, "we do so," James said, "in the exercise of our individual freedom, and build out our religion in the way most congruous with our personal susceptibilities."31

It is this deference to our personal susceptibilities, needs and desires which Intellectualists find most offensive. To interpret the 'More' on its farther side to be anything for which science and logic cannot account, simply because one desires or needs it to be such, indicates, from their point of view, a grossly irresponsible attitude toward the truth. As we saw earlier, desire and need, in the Intellectualists' opinion, should never influence belief. Belief should be determined only by evidence; and if evidence is lacking, judgment

31 Ibid., p. 388.
should be suspended, however strong be the desire or need for the object in question. Judgment should be suspended until evidence is forthcoming. Over-belief, i.e., belief that outstrips the evidence, is, in the view of the Intellectualists, a vice to be avoided at all cost.

William James, on the other hand, defended the right of individuals to their over-beliefs, whatever they might be. He went so far as to say that "the most interesting and valuable things about a man are usually his over-beliefs."^32

From the point of view of James, whatever enables us to assume the burdens of life enthusiastically; to devote ourselves to life's task of opposing evil and promoting good with courage, generosity, and zest, is itself good and beneficial to us and to the world as a whole. And he felt that nothing does this quite so effectively as religious emotion, the religious excitement attendant upon the belief that one is part of a wider more spiritual world in which his ideals have everlasting value. But, as James pointed out, very often this excitement, so salutary to man, will be aroused in an individual only by certain intellectual ideas to which he, because of his personal mental constitution, is particularly susceptible. These ideas, which may indeed be over-beliefs in the strict sense, i.e., beliefs which outstrip the evidence provided by experience and reason, will thus be essential to that person's religion and, in James's opinion, pragmatically

[^32]: Ibid.
justified. Over-beliefs "in various directions are absolutely indispensable,"33 James said. They should be treated "with tenderness and tolerance so long as they are not intolerant themselves,"34 not only because no one is in possession of an absolute point of view from which he can criticize with authority the faith of someone else, but more importantly because of their value for human life. As indicated above, it is a man's over-beliefs that generate in him the kind of religious excitement which enables him to shoulder the responsibilities of life with courage, generosity, and even joy. Moreover, it is often the enthusiasm which is sparked by his religious faith that makes a man a hero. Certainly faith which can produce such salutary effects deserves respect.

Leaving pragmatic considerations aside, however, and considering only the possibility of verifying the truth or falsity of religious faith, James concluded that the verification of religious over-beliefs may indeed be possible only by means of an antecedent belief in them—an antecedent trust in the revelatory power of our needs and desires, the very presence of which may be an indication of the reality of their objects. James pointed out that Intellectualists do not object to our trusting our wants in other areas of human endeavor—in business, art, and science, for example. Men of science, whom the Intellectualists revere, need and desire a uniform law of nature, for instance; they postulate it and act upon it; and

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
nature corroborates their faith. Who is to say, James asked, that the religious man, indulging his faith in the spiritual world which he desires, will not meet with similar success?

In other cases divinations based on inner interests have proved prophetic enough. Take science itself! Without an imperious inner demand on our part for ideal logical and mathematical harmonies, we should never have attained to proving that such harmonies lie hidden between all the chinks and interstices of the crude natural world. Hardly a law has been established in science, hardly a fact ascertained, which was not first sought after, often with sweat and blood, to gratify an inner need. Whence such needs come from we do not know: we find them in us, and biological psychology so far only classes them with Darwin's 'accidental variations.' But the inner need of believing that this world of nature is a sign of something more spiritual and eternal than itself is just as strong and authoritative in those who feel it, as the inner need of uniform laws of causation ever can be in a professionally scientific head. The toil of many generations has proved the latter need prophetic. Why may not the former one be prophetic, too? And if needs of ours outrun the visible universe, why may not that be a sign that an invisible universe is there?

James pointed out that the animal, like man, also has needs and desires and that the animal's wants, which can all be satisfied in this sensible world, lead it to seek and to find satisfaction. Man's desires, however, cannot all be satisfied in the visible world; indeed, many of them can find fulfillment only in a world that is more spiritual. But if the brute, seeking the satisfaction of its needs, is ultimately led to their fulfillment, may not man's other-worldly desires also be fulfilled, if he but trust them enough to look for their objects?

35James, "Is Life Worth Living?," Essays on Faith and Morals, pp. 24-25.
In James's opinion, a man should trust his religious desires. This does not necessarily mean defining the unseen world in detail, and it certainly does not mean condemning beliefs different from one's own. Trusting one's religious demands, however, does mean living in the light of them; it means acting as though the unseen world is real. Religious belief in this sense is not much different from the working hypothesis of the man of science. In attempting to verify his theory, the scientist acts as if it were true, and expects the result to disappoint him if his assumption is false. The longer disappointment is delayed, the stronger grows his faith in his theory.

Now, in such questions as God, immortality, absolute morality, and free-will, no non-papal believer at the present day pretends his faith to be of an essentially different complexion; he can always doubt his creed. But his intimate persuasion is that the odds in its favor are strong enough to warrant him in acting all along on the assumption of its truth.36

Indeed, it may be that only by such antecedent faith, i.e., by our acting as if the religious hypothesis is true, will verification of it ever come at all. After all, the religious hypothesis represents the divine part of reality as having personal form. It may very well be that telling evidence that there is such a God whose attitude toward us is friendly may be withheld until we make the first move, until we meet the hypothesis half-way, until we extend our hand to God as it were; for we may be dealing with the type of reality that will appear only to the believer. In human relations, it is very often

one person's trust that another will like him and his consequent willingness to be the first to offer friendship that makes the second person's liking actually come at all. The situation may be analogously similar in the case of relations between divine and human personalities. Perhaps telling evidence of divine good will in our behalf may be forever withheld from us unless we are willing to believe the religious hypothesis in advance of such evidence. In James's words,

just as a man who in a company of gentlemen made no advances, asked a warrant for every concession, and believed no one's word without proof, would cut himself off by such churlishness from all the social rewards that a more trusting spirit would earn,—so here, one who should shut himself up in snarling logicality and try to make the gods extort his recognition willy-nilly, or not get it at all, might cut himself off forever from his only opportunity of making the gods' acquaintance.37

Certainly, that evidence for God's reality which comes under the aspect of responses to our prayers—help in the form of inspiration, for example, new spiritual energy, strength in the face of formidable difficulties—will not come until we pray. But to pray presupposes belief in the reality of the one to whom we pray; it presupposes faith in his love and concern for us, in his power to help, in his willingness to come to our aid. Furthermore, to pray presupposes our willingness to put our fate in his hands; and this is faith in the fullest sense of the term. For religious faith is more than mere acceptance of God as real. It involves giving ourselves up to his will. All belief, of course, involves some active

response to the object accepted as a reality; but the nature of the divine is such that self-surrender is the only appropriate response that we can make to it.

Thus, James pointed out, the very evidence which the Intellectualists said must antedate belief will not come unless it itself is antedated by belief. We are dealing with a reality, the very access to which requires faith; and obedience to the admonition of the Intellectualists would put entirely out of our reach in this life a whole realm of truth which is indispensable for life's happy and fruitful fulfillment.

Indeed, if there is a God and if the successful outcome of this world depends, not only upon what we as human beings do, but also upon God's work—upon God's helping us and others in answer to our prayers, for example,—then certainly our prayers and the faith they presuppose are indispensable to the world's well-being. Indeed, if such is the case, religion, as William James said, is man's most important function in the universe. But that such is the case can only be empirically verified by our acting in advance as though it is true. Verification will come, if it comes at all, only if we first espouse the religious hypothesis by faith and live by it.

Certainly, then, the Intellectualists' admonition, to suspend judgment until the evidence is all in, is an unreasonable one; for to suspend judgment in regard to the religious hypothesis is in effect to act as though it were false. And in so doing, we lose the bounty to be gained by believing it
just as surely as if we positively denied it. As James indicated, in an issue of such magnitude, we cannot afford to wait for verification; to be on the winning side at the end, we must get on it now. Surely science and philosophy, which can neither prove nor disprove religion's truth, can issue no prohibitions to us here.

Furthermore, from James's point of view, absolute certitude about the truth of any factual proposition is not possible in this life, as we saw above.38 For although the human mind can possess the truth about reality, it cannot be infallibly certain that it has that truth even when it does in fact possess it. Thus, except for the data of the present moment of consciousness, doubt is always possible. And for this reason, the prescription of the Intellectualists, to wait for conclusive evidence before believing anything, is unrealistic and impractical.

When I look at the religious question as it really puts itself to concrete men, and when I think of all the possibilities which both practically and theoretically it involves, then this command that we shall put a stopper on our heart, instincts, and courage, and wait—acting of course meanwhile more or less as if religion were not true—till doomsday, or till such time as our intellect and senses working together may have raked in evidence enough,—this command, I say, seems to me the queerest idol ever manufactured in the philosophic cave. Were we scholastic absolutists, there might be more excuse. If we had an infallible intellect with its objective certitudes, we might feel ourselves disloyal to such a perfect organ of knowledge in not trusting to it exclusively, in not waiting for its releasing word. But if we are empiricists, if we believe that no bell in us tolls to let us know for

38 See above, Chapter II, pp. 57-63; Chapter III, pp. 111-113.
certain when truth is in our grasp, then it seems a
piece of idle fantasticality to preach so solemnly our
duty of waiting for the bell. Indeed we may wait if
we will,—I hope you do not think that I am denying
that,—but if we do so, we do so at our peril as much
as if we believed. In either case we act, taking our
life in our hands.39

In the question of God, then, as in all questions which
cannot be definitively answered by sense and reason, James
defended each man's right to believe or not to believe as he
wills. "No one of us ought to issue vetoes to the other, nor
should we bandy words of abuse. We ought, on the contrary,
delicately and profoundly to respect one another's mental
freedom. . . ."40

In James's opinion, however, although it is a man's right
to believe or disbelieve as he chooses, believing is to his
advantage and that of the world at large. As far as the indi-
vidual man is concerned, the belief that he and the things he
cherishes are in the care of a loving God enables him to bear
the sufferings and hardships of life with fortitude, equanimity,
and a happiness that transcends all merely natural joy. More-
over, religious belief sparks him to vigorous moral action.
Believing that he and God are working together for ideals
which they both hold dear, the religious man eagerly under-
takes the task of promoting good and eliminating evil and is
able to do what life demands of him with ease and enthusiasm.


40 Ibid., p. 61.
The benefits of religious belief for the world are not unrelated to its benefits for the individual. Since the world is what people by their living make it, whatever salutary effects religion may have on individual lives also benefit the world as a whole. In making a man a better person, religious belief makes him also a better citizen of the community and of the world. His moral action, for example, is directed not only toward his own good and that of his family but also toward the good of his neighbors, the community, and the world at large. And the evils which he seeks to eliminate are not merely his own private ills but those that afflict others as well. As James pointed out, saintly men sacrifice themselves every day for God and their fellow-men. Moreover, the example of the saintly man inspires others to live lives of faith also and to emulate the saint's virtues. Indeed religious men, acting as "a leaven of righteousness in the world," help to bring mankind as a whole to a higher level of perfection.

As far as the objective truth or falsity of religion's claims is concerned, William James himself looked at the question pragmatically; and from his pragmatistic point of view, the beneficial character of religion cannot be separated from the question of its truth. According to his pragmatistic principles, if an hypothesis works satisfactorily in the widest sense, it is true. James concluded that because of the uses of religion to man and to the world at large there must be

41 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 290.
truth in it. Experience has amply shown, he said, that the hypothesis of God works and works well. Not only does it work, but more than any other hypothesis proposed to man's belief, it makes human life worth living and the world itself a good place in which to live it.
CHAPTER VII

A MAN OF FAITH

No era in recorded human history has been free of pain and suffering. The human situation as described by men through the centuries has always been less than paradisiacal. Man has suffered a variety of indignities at the hands of the world; in every age he has known poverty and want, disease, loneliness, and oppression, not to mention the horrors of war which in every era has raged in one corner of the world or another. History has indeed been a "bath of blood,"¹ as William James pointed out.

The world with its ever-present phenomena of human suffering has provided reflective men through the ages with inexhaustible material for speculation. Few philosophers have failed to be troubled by the presence of evil in the world; and their attempts to reconcile it with some kind of reasonable account of reality have ranged anywhere from ushering it out of existence under the cloak of illusion to considering it as real but somehow a blessing in disguise. What particular role evil plays in the drama of life depends upon which philosopher is describing the action. Among the various attitudes which

men professing wisdom had adopted toward evil, two extremes can be found—that of extreme optimism and that of radical pessimism. Unmitigated optimism is inclined to see evil as somehow less than real. The monistic Idealists, whom William James opposed so vigorously in his day, were of this frame of mind. They asserted that reality is completely one, unchanging, and good—an Absolute of which experienced multiplicity, change and evil are but appearances. Their gospel was that experienced phenomena are but manifestations of this Absolute, which in itself is perfect in every way; thus they bade man to rejoice because evil is not real at all.

At the opposite pole, the radically pessimistic philosopher finds evil so all-pervasive that good seems almost non-existent. Evil in one form or another appears to be the only real

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2 The Idealist, F. H. Bradley, wrote the following in regard to evil: "Evil and good are not illusions, but they are most certainly appearances. They are one-sided aspects, each overruled and transmuted in the Whole. ... As with truth and error, so with good and bad, the opposition is not absolute. For, to some extent and in some manner, perfection is everywhere realized. ... The Absolute is perfect in all its detail, it is equally true and good throughout." (Appearance and Reality, p. 401.) See above, Chapter I, p. 17.

3 In the pessimistic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, every individual thing, which is but an appearance of the one noumenal reality, the Will to live, tries to assert its own existence at the expense of other things. Hence, the phenomenal world is one of conflict. Schopenhauer's pessimistic attitude toward life is especially evident in the following passage: "If life were in itself a blessing to be prized, and decidedly to be preferred to non-existence, the exit from it would not need to be guarded by such fearful sentinels as death and its terrors. But who would continue in life as it is if death were less terrible? And again, who could even endure the thought of death if life were a pleasure! But thus the former has still always this good, that it is the end of life, and we console ourselves with regard to the suffering of life with death, and
force in the world, or at least the force which is destined ultimately to triumph. At first glance, despair seems to be the only appropriate response to a world so conceived. And yet thinkers of a pessimistic frame of mind never cease to look for some way in which to live with the inexorable gloom of their philosophy. They all seek some compensating factors in life in spite of its impending doom. Some exhort man to grasp as much pleasure as he can, since no matter how he lives, in their view, death is the final end of everything. Others advocate a stoical resignation in the face of pain; and still others suggest a militant struggle against evil, the hopelessness of the fight notwithstanding.

Although contemporary existentialism is not necessarily pessimistic, it does give us some examples of modern man's efforts to cope with life viewed pessimistically. For instance, Jean-Paul Sartre, seeing death as man's ultimate destiny,\(^4\), counsels man to achieve authentic existence in this life by facing the truth of his situation and by accepting the responsibility of his freedom in the alien world in which he is abandoned.\(^5\) To fail to admit one's freedom and total responsibility, with regard to death with the suffering of life." (The World as Will and Idea, III, trans. by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp [London: Trübner & Co., Ludgate Hill, 1886], p. 389.)

\(^4\)"...death haunts me at the very heart of each of my projects as their inevitable reverse side." (Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes [New York: Citadel Press, 1966], p. 523.)

\(^5\)"I am responsible for everything, in fact, except for my very responsibility, for I am not the foundation of my being. Therefore everything takes place as if I were compelled to be
Sartre claims, is to live inauthentically. To expect help from heaven or to lay the responsibility for what happens in the world upon God is to hide the truth from oneself and to flee the anguish of one's situation in bad faith.

Somewhat more appealing, perhaps, is the prescription of Albert Camus. Although he, too, suggested a rather stoical approach to life and advocated living in the truth of the situation, he did feel that some kind of joy is possible for men in this world in spite of the fact that death may indeed be the ultimate end of everything. Camus felt that men can find at least a limited kind of happiness in loving solidarity with each other and in their common rebellion against suffering and evil. He did not believe that rebelling against evil will eliminate it altogether, however.

Camus did not categorically deny God and immortality, but he said that he could not believe in them. Speaking at the Dominican Monastery of Latour-Maubourg in 1948, Camus said, "...I wish to declare also that, not feeling that I possess any absolute truth or any message, I shall never start from the supposition that Christian truth is illusory, but merely from the fact that I could not accept it." (Albert Camus, "The Unbeliever and Christians," Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, trans. by Justin O'Brien [New York: Modern Library, 1960], p. 52.)

"Rebellion indefatigably confronts evil, from which it can only derive a new impetus. Man can master in himself everything that should be mastered. He should rectify in creation everything that can be rectified. And after he has done so, children will still die unjustly even in a perfect society. Even by his greatest effort man can only propose to diminish
man who revolts against suffering and oppression shares in the struggles and destiny of all men and, in this solidarity with all other human beings, finds a measure of joy. "Our brothers are breathing under the same sky as we; justice is a living thing. Now is born that strange joy which helps one live and die. . . ."8

The loving revolt against human suffering which Camus advocated was not unlike the moralistic approach to life that suggested itself to William James in his youth. At that time, as we noted above,9 James sometimes found it difficult to believe in God and for a time seemed drawn toward a materialistic philosophy. Materialism, however, promised James nothing but the ultimate destruction of himself and all that he cherished. Struggling to live with the illness which plagued him in those years and the anticipated darkness of the future, James looked to moralism to give meaning to his life. He felt that in spite of materialism's promised annihilation of himself and all that he held dear,10 he could still find some satisfaction in living by helping his fellow-men to suffer less and to

arithmetically the sufferings of the world. But the injustice and the suffering of the world will remain and, no matter how limited they are, they will not cease to be an outrage." (Albert Camus, The Rebel, trans. by Anthony Bower, with a Foreword by Sir Herbert Read [New York: Vintage Books, 1959], p. 303.)

8Ibid., p. 306.
9See above, Chapter I, pp. 9-12.
10See above, Chapter I, p. 11.
enjoy more.  

However, just as the compensations of Sartre's authentic existence and the consolations of Camus's fraternal solidarity with other men leave something to be desired when one considers that death is still one's ultimate destiny, so too the pure moralism which attracted the youthful William James was somewhat less than satisfying and indeed was incapable of completely neutralizing the effects of the pessimism to which his temporarily materialistic view of life was conducive.

As James himself came to realize, while a purely moralistic approach to life may steel one to bear life's hardships and help him to survive in a world in which evil is destined to have the last word, it cannot enable a person to live with any genuine enthusiasm or real happiness. A world in which one's efforts can produce no lasting results, a world which

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In 1868, William James wrote the following in a letter to his friend, Tom Ward: "All I can tell you is the thought that with me outlasts all others, and onto which, like a rock, I find myself washed up when the waves of doubt are weltering over all the rest of the world; and that is the thought of my having a will, and of my belonging to a brotherhood of men possessed of a capacity for pleasure and pain of different kinds. For even at one's lowest ebb of belief, the fact remains empirically certain (and by our will we can, if not absolutely refrain from looking beyond that empirical fact, at least practically and on the whole accept it and let it suffice us)--that men suffer and enjoy. And if we have to give up all hope of seeing into the purposes of God, or to give up theoretically the idea of final causes, and of God anyhow as vain and leading to nothing for us, we can, by our will, make the enjoyment of our brothers stand us in the stead of a final cause; and through a knowledge of the fact that that enjoyment on the whole depends on what individuals accomplish, lead a life so active, and so sustained by a clean conscience as not to need to fret much." (The Letters of William James, I, 130) See above, Chapter I, p. 14.
promises nothing but the ultimate decay of all the ideals to which a man aspires seems not to be capable of calling forth his best efforts or of tapping the depths of his personal resources. Indeed, a world viewed pessimistically is a world alien to man. It is a world in which man's hopes and ideal aspirations have no real objects. It is a world in which man's inclinations to create lasting goodness and beauty have no relevance—a world in which man with his natural propensity to fashion the universe for the better is somehow out of place. Even moralism, whatever form it takes, cannot compensate for the foreignness of such a world.

Consequently, however inclined James may have been to see life pessimistically in his youth, he could not rest content with such a dark view of things; and he later rejected pessimism as an attitude that is useless, fruitless, and corrosive. It is corrosive because by negating man's ideal motives for action, pessimism tends to stifle man's active tendencies and to render him apathetic, indolent, and even cynical. However, while James would not approach the world pessimistically, neither could he look at it with unqualified optimism. A universe in which evil has no part—a world such as the one described by monistic Idealism, i.e., a world in which pain and suffering are but illusory appearances of the perfect Absolute—such a world was just as foreign to William James as the radically evil state of affairs posited by extremely pessimistic philosophers. A completely optimistic picture of reality simply did not square with William James's experience.
He had lived through pain and suffering, both mental and physical; and he could not close his eyes to evil; he could not blink it away. But more than this, the seemingly cheerful picture of reality painted by Idealism was not cheerful at all—at least not from James's point of view; for it was totally alien, not only to James's experience, but more importantly to his aspirations and to what he knew to be the aspirations of most men. James felt that most men shared with him the desire to be a match for the universe and to feel that their active powers were relevant to the world and its needs.

We demand in it [the universe] a character for which our emotions and active propensities shall be a match. Small as we are, minute as is the point by which the cosmos impinges upon each one of us, each one desires to feel that his reaction at that point is congruous with the demands of the vast whole,--that he balances the latter, so to speak, and is able to do what it expects of him.12

In James's opinion, man has a natural instinct to do, to make, to create—in general to contribute to the growth, development, and perfection of the universe by his actions. However, if as monistic Idealism claimed, the world is completely finished and perfectly good and beautiful independently of all human activity, then indeed men's aspirations to act creatively and to contribute something lasting and worthwhile to the universe are pointless and vain. Paradoxically, when forced upon a man with such active propensities as those of William James, the extremely optimistic view of monistic Idealism could

12James, "The Sentiment of Rationality," Essays on Faith and Morals, p. 84.
easily turn into pessimism and despair.

Thus, James could be neither a radical pessimist nor an unmitigated optimist. He characterized his own view of reality as melioristic. In James's opinion, the world indeed has its bad points, but it has its good ones too; and there is no reason why the proportions of good and evil must remain the same. The balance can certainly shift in either direction depending upon how men live their lives. Indeed it can become worse; but what James found heartening was the fact that the world is an open world, the fact that the world can improve and that the amount of good in it can increase and even outweigh the evil as the result of human activities.

The world, in William James's melioristic view, is not totally alien to men as it is when seen pessimistically or optimistically. There is a proportion between the world and man's active powers; in fact the world is in some degree plastic in man's hands. Certainly it offers resistance, but this fact only increases the challenge and heightens the sense of adventure in the man who sets out to change things for the better. The resistance of brute facts notwithstanding, James felt that the world has shown itself susceptible to modification by human activity.

Thus James's world can be described not only as melioristic but also as humanistic; for it is a world which in large measure is what men have made it and which can become as good as they want it to be. In James's mind, human powers seem to be singularly adapted to changing the world. As we saw
above, man's receptive faculties present the sensible world to him, his theoretic faculty reflects upon the sensory presentations and then defines the way in which his active powers will react to them; finally by his active powers, man responds to the world and affects it for better or worse. James believed that the world was given to man to fashion and complete; and strangely enough, it is by fashioning his own life that man fashions the world. Indeed what man makes of himself determines what he makes of the universe. The good that he builds into his own existence not only becomes part of the world's goodness but inspires other men to be good and to do good also. Man's happiness and success become the world's happiness and success.

In James's opinion, however, genuinely happy successful living is possible only to men of faith. In fact, the success of the world as a whole depends upon human willingness to believe beyond the evidence when any situation calls for it. Fruitful human existence, for example, demands that men believe in themselves and in their own powers. The lack of evidence notwithstanding, they must believe in their ability to know truth. Furthermore, they must believe in their ability to act or not to act, as they choose; in other words, they must have faith in their own freedom.

Furthermore, if they are to eliminate the causes of pain and suffering in the world to any extent and to produce the

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13 See above, Chapter III, p. 103.
conditions conducive to human happiness and well-being, they must believe that their powers are relevant to the universe, that evil is exorable and that what happens in the universe is not rigidly determined independently of them. They must have faith in unrealized ideals—at least in the possibility of their actualization. However, no less important than a man's faith in himself and in his ideals is his faith in other men. Any man's effective contribution to the world demands that he believe in other men's good intentions and in their willingness and ability to do their share of the work in fashioning the universe. As William James pointed out, the world will be a success only if each person, trusting that every other man will do his best, does his own part with vigor and courage.

James knew that it does take courage to do one's best in the work of the world. For the results of one's efforts are not certified in advance. The changing character of experience, the fallibility of human knowledge, and the appearance of unforeseen consequences are such that it is not possible to know with absolute certitude what the best course of action in a given case is or the exact results which a proposed plan of activity will effect. If a man waits for certitude in these matters, he will probably not act at all. Effective human action thus requires faith; and because faith involves risks—the risk of error and the risk of failure, for example—faith demands courage and daring. In short, faith requires an adventurous spirit.

However, it is difficult, if not impossible to act with
courage and daring if the goals that one seeks are, at most, only temporary goods that will eventually pass into nothingness, if one's heroic efforts can produce no lasting results, if all the goodness and beauty that one strives to realize are doomed to inevitable annihilation—as the materialists of William James's day were wont to suggest. The courageous and even heroic human action which the world's salvation demands, therefore, can best be exercised by men who see this world as more than mere matter in motion. The men who are most capable of changing the world for the better are those who see it as but a "part of a more spiritual universe" in which superior powers, friendly to men, hold good and righteous things dear and guarantee the survival of the ideals which men cherish and for which they work. In other words, the men who can do the most good for the world are those who have faith not only in themselves and in other men but more importantly in God.

William James believed that if a man is to do his best in the work of the world, he has need of religious faith. Purely moral effort may enable him to do what is necessary for survival in a grudging spirit of resignation. But religious faith is necessary to spark him to vigorous and enthusiastic moral action. Nothing can inspire a man to the heroic virtue of which he is capable quite so effectively as the knowledge that the ideals for which he fights are divinely esteemed and have everlasting value. Not only does religious faith bolster

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14 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 367.
a man's 'fighting spirit,' but the knowledge that there is a God who helps and protects him, a God who will guarantee that all will be well no matter what happens, gives him the equanimity and stability to fulfill his obligations in spite of all the adversity that might otherwise undermine his effectiveness. As James pointed out in "The Gospel of Relaxation," there is very little that inhibits us and destroys our effective power as much as worry; and "the sovereign cure for worry is religious faith." Faith is indeed the great antidote to anxiety. As James said,

to him who has a hold on vaster and more permanent realities the hourly vicissitudes of his personal destiny seem relatively insignificant things. The really religious person is accordingly unshakable and full of equanimity, and calmly ready for any duty that the day may bring forth.

William James did not mean to suggest that the religious man does not suffer, nor did he mean to suggest that the religious man faces the trials and tribulations of life without great feeling or emotion. The religious man may, in fact, suffer greatly; he may indeed be emotionally shaken by the great tragedies of life just as other men are. But the tragedies of his life do not shake his resolve to pursue that which is good and avoid that which is evil. They do not shake his belief in God's loving care of him or turn him aside from the fulfillment of his duties.

The importance of faith in God for the well-being of the

16 Ibid., pp. 255-56.
world is made still clearer by a further consideration no less practical than those that have gone before. If God does exist, James pointed out, and if the world's salvation depends upon God's help given at the prayerful request of men, then certainly the faith which prayer presupposes is indispensable.

In James's mind, there was no doubt that the world would fare best if it were in the hands of men of faith—men who believed in themselves, in other men, and above all in God. Whether James realized it or not, he himself was such a man of faith—a man who believed in himself (although not without effort), trusted other men, and believed that God actively shared his own concern for the triumph of that which is good and righteous.

William James's belief in himself, however, was not a spontaneous belief; rather it involved a deliberate act of his will. His belief in himself and in his powers to act responsibly and fruitfully was an attitude which, as a young man, he forced himself to adopt in the face of physical and mental difficulties which might have made a weaker man accept permanent defeat and resign himself to a life of passivity and uselessness. The inactivity which James's physical ailments seemed to force upon him in his youth and his numerous attacks of neurasthenia afflicted him with a kind of moral paralysis. Moreover, his early philosophical reflections, tending, as they sometimes did, toward materialistic determinism, suggested to him that a life of moral impotence and futility was his inescapable fate. Inspired by his reading of Renovvier,
however, James eventually came to see that determinism was no more a proven fact than freedom was and that whether one was a determinist or an indeterminist depended upon one's choice. And William James, himself, chose to believe in freedom, particularly in his own freedom and in his ability to affect the world for the better by the consequences of his free choices. As his diary reveals, James chose to believe in his own individual worth and creative power.¹⁷

Determinism was not the only philosophical attitude which could stifle activity, however. The skepticism to which reflection upon man's fallibility often led could be just as paralyzing as philosophical determinism, for action presupposes conviction. But James would not allow either determinism or skepticism to relegate him to a life of moral or intellectual

¹⁷"I think that yesterday was a crisis in my life. I finished the first part of Renouvier's second 'Essais' and see no reason why his definition of Free Will--'the sustaining of a thought because I choose to when I might have other thoughts' --need be the definition of an illusion. At any rate, I will assume for the present--until next year--that it is no illusion. My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will. For the remainder of the year, I will abstain from the mere speculation and contemplative Gründele in which my nature takes most delight, and voluntarily cultivate the feeling of moral freedom, by reading books favorable to it, as well as by acting. . . . Hitherto, when I have felt like taking a free initiative, like daring to act originally, without carefully waiting for contemplation of the external world to determine all for me, suicide seemed the most manly form to put my daring into; now, I will go a step further with my will, not only act with it, but believe as well; believe in my individual reality and creative power. My belief, to be sure, can't be optimistic--but I will posit life (the real, the good) in the self-governing resistance of the ego to the world. Life shall be built in doing and suffering and creating." ("Diary," The Writings of William James, pp. 7-8.) See above, Chapter I, pp. 20-21.
stagnation. He assumed, without the proof that rationalists demanded, that it is possible for man to know truth. Realizing, however, that man cannot be sure that he has truth even when he does in fact possess it and that, except for the data of the present moment, doubt is always possible regarding matters of fact, James was willing to espouse a life of action based upon probabilities assumed as true—in short, a life of action based upon faith. 18

This faith which William James exercised, however, was not a blind faith; it was not arbitrary and irresponsible. When evidence was available he heeded it; when evidence was lacking and the issues were insignificant, he was inclined to suspend judgment and to maintain a 'wise skepticism.' But when the issues were vital, when action was required, or when suspending judgment was equivalent to disbelief, then James, like the practical man that he was, believed what it was necessary to believe in order to act effectively and felicitously in spite of the lack of evidence. Even in this case, however, his belief was not arbitrary. The facts had to be such that what he chose to believe was at least a real possibility.

If ever William James's faith could be considered

18 "Skepticism, or unrest, in short, can always have the last word. After every definition of an object, reflection may arise, infect it with the cogito, and so discriminate it from the object in se. This is possible ad infinitum. That we do not all do it is because at a certain point most of us get tired of the play, resolve to stop, and assuming something for true, pass on to a life of action based on that." (James, "Lewes's 'Problems of Life and Mind,'" Collected Essays and Reviews, p. 10.)
prodigal, it would have to be in regard to other people. In spite of the blindness from which James claimed all men suffer relative to the lives of others, he himself believed fervently in the individual worth of every human being, in the significance of every human life.

Wherever a process of life communicates an eagerness to him who lives it, there the life becomes genuinely significant. . . . wherever it [eagerness] is found, there is the zest, the tingle, the excitement of reality; and there is 'importance' in the only real and positive sense in which importance ever anywhere can be.19

But, James said, we may easily miss this importance, this significance, in the life of another; for we feel the importance of our own lives so intensely that we are easily blinded to the presence of this same feeling in others. Thus we often find it difficult, if not impossible, to judge accurately and properly to assess the value of other people's lives.

James felt that if we could look at each person through the eyes of love, we would see that every human being's "life-throbs are among the wonders of creation."20 Indeed, the shadows of intolerance, prejudice, and cruelty would soon disappear in the brightness of such a vision.

Every Jack sees in his own particular Jill charms and perfections to the enchantment of which we stolid onlookers are stone-cold. And which has the superior view of the absolute truth, he or we? Which has the more vital insight into the nature of Jill's existence,


as a fact? Is he in excess, being in this matter a maniac? or are we in defect, being victims of a pathological anaesthesia as regards Jill's magical importance? Surely the latter; surely to Jack are the pro-founder truths revealed; surely poor Jill's palpitating little life-throbs are among the wonders of creation, are worthy of this sympathetic interest; and it is to our shame that the rest of us cannot feel like Jack. For Jack realizes Jill concretely, and we do not. He struggles toward a union with her inner life, divining her feelings, anticipating her desires, understanding her limits as manfully as he can, and yet inadequately, too; for he is also afflicted with some blindness, even here. Whilst we, dead clods that we are, do not even seek after these things, but are contented that that portion of eternal fact named Jill should be for us as if it were not. Jill, who knows her inner life, knows that Jack's way of taking it—so importantly—is the true and serious way; and she responds to the truth in him by taking him truly and seriously too. May the ancient blindness never wrap its clouds about either of them again! Where would any of us be, were there no one willing to know us as we really are or ready to repay us for our insight by making recognizant return? We ought, all of us, to realize each other in this intense, pathetic, and important way.21

William James knew that genuine knowledge involves sympathy and love. He knew that love enables one somehow to enter into the very interior of the reality to be known, and that the result is an intuition of that reality which the non-lover can never possess. As James indicated in "Is Life Worth Living?," the heart is "our deepest organ of communication with the nature of things."22

For the most part, however, our blindness is such that we cannot view each and every human being with the same sympathetic interest with which a lover views his beloved. Because

21 Ibid., pp. 285-86.

22 James, "Is Life Worth Living?," Essays on Faith and Morals, p. 31.
most of us do not love enough, we seldom penetrate into the inner lives of others and rarely do we discern even dimly the significance of their lives as they experience it. Nevertheless, the knowledge of our blindness, James said, ought make us beware of intolerance, indifference, and cruelty.

James, himself, was a man of great tenderness and sympathy for others. Indeed, he may have vigorously opposed a philosophical position with which he disagreed, but the person of the philosopher whose views he could not accept he held in reverent esteem. And he defended the man's right to believe whatever made his life more livable and happy, however divergent his beliefs might have been from those of James himself.

No doubt James did not realize that he was in fact describing himself when he spoke of certain individuals being blessed with an extraordinary talent for friendship. Such persons, he said, take a singular delight in the lives of others and "know more of truth than if their hearts were not so big." That James himself was such a person is evident; his published correspondence reveals the multitude of his friends and the very tender reverence and affection with which he regarded them. He truly delighted in the lives of his fellow-men and seemed gifted with a singularly vivid realization of the beauty and significance of each one. James exhorted all men to be ever on the alert for the richness that surrounds them in the lives

of other people.

... no outward changes of condition in life can keep the nightingale of its eternal meaning from singing in all sorts of different men's hearts. That is the main fact to remember. If we could not only admit it with our lips, but really and truly believe it, how our convulsive insistencies, how our antipathies and dreads of each other, would soften down! If the poor and the rich could look at each other in this way, sub specie aeternatis, how gentle would grow their disputes! what tolerance and good humor, what willingness to live and let live, would come into the world!24

Although William James did not subscribe to any particular creed and was not at all attracted toward institutionalized religion, he was unquestionably a man of religious faith. He professed a belief in God, i.e., he believed in the reality of some kind of superhuman consciousness with which man is in contact and from whom man can receive help and support. James pointed out that it is literally true that men feel themselves to be in touch with a 'More' of the same quality from which help, strength, and consolation come as though from outside of themselves. As we saw in the last chapter, James felt that the 'More' on its hither side is probably nothing other than the subconscious continuation of a man's conscious life. But what the 'More' is on its farther side, James said, is a matter of individual over-belief, i.e., a matter of faith.

According to James's own private over-belief, the further limits of man's being plunge into a dimension of existence totally other than the sensible and merely understandable world. James felt that whether we call this region mystical or super-

24Ibid., p. 310.
natural, we belong to this region in a very intimate way, because our ideal impulses originate there.\textsuperscript{25} They \textit{must} originate there, he said, because they possess us in a manner for which we cannot account. The fact that this mystical region produces real effects in the empirical world indicates that it is real itself and not merely ideal.\textsuperscript{26}

When we commune with it, work is actually done upon our finite personality, for we are turned into new men, and consequences in the way of conduct follow in the natural world upon our regenerative change. But that which produces effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself, so I feel as if we had no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal.\textsuperscript{27}

James called this higher part of the universe 'God.' "God is the natural appellation, for us Christians at least, for the supreme reality, so I will call this higher part of the universe by the name of God."\textsuperscript{28}

Although James conceived God as the "higher part of the universe," indeed the highest part, he did not think of him as being totally unlike man. From James's point of view, both God and man are personal beings--personal beings who are exist-

\textsuperscript{25}It is not always clear what William James meant by the word 'ideal.' He used the word variously in different contexts. In general, the term seems to refer in one way or another to the conceptual order. However, in the term, 'ideal impulses,' 'ideal' seems to be roughly equivalent to 'noble.' An ideal impulse would seem to be an impulse to conduct oneself according to the highest standards of excellence conceived by the mind.

\textsuperscript{26}Here the term 'ideal' means 'conceptual.'

\textsuperscript{27}James, \textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience}, p. 389.

\textsuperscript{28}\textit{Ibid.}
ing in time and working out a history. Thus, James did not conceive of God as eternal and immutable. Nor did he conceive God to be infinite. From James's point of view, to say that God is infinite, or without limit, suggests that there is nothing outside of him, that his being somehow includes all other beings as parts or aspects of himself. In James's mind, such an infinite, eternal, and immutable God would be identical with the Absolute posited by the Idealists, and James felt that the postulation of the Absolute was in no way warranted by experience. Furthermore, in James's opinion, the Absolute was totally foreign to human life and could have no appeal for the common man. As awesome and admirable as an infinite, eternal, and immutable Absolute might seem to be, James could not see how it could elicit sympathy, love or friendly cooperation from ordinary people, for friendship implies some common ground, some similarity or likeness, however imperfect. 29 Hence, the God of William James is a finite, temporal God, who, like man, is working for the salvation and perfection of the world. In James's view, man and God share at least some common ideals; they both have their work to do; they both have their problems. Thus there is basis for sympathy and friendly cooperation; in fact, James was inclined to feel that God and man need each other.

We and God have business with each other; and in opening ourselves to his influence our deepest destiny is fulfilled. The universe, at those parts of it which our

29 See above, Chapter II, pp. 33-37, for fuller treatment of James's objections to the Absolute.
personal being constitutes, takes a turn genuinely for the worse or for the better in proportion as each one of us fulfills or evades God's demands.30

Although James did not clearly delineate the features of his God, certain characteristics are easily discernible. As we have already noted, James conceived the divine part of the universe to be more than merely an impersonal force. He conceived God to be a personal being capable of knowledge, love, and action: "He must be cognizant and responsive in some way."31 And, James wrote, "He must do."32 For James, God was the powerful ally of his own ideals. Writing to Thomas Davidson in the early 1880's, James said:

... I find myself less and less able to do without him [God]. He need not be an all-including "subjective unity"33 of the universe."... All I mean is that there must be some subjective unity in the universe which has purposes commensurable with my own, and which is at the same time large enough to be, among all the powers that may be there, the strongest. ... In saying "God exists" all I imply is that my purposes are cared for by a mind so powerful as on the whole to control the drift of the universe.34

James believed in God not because he had any direct mystical experience of the divine reality, but rather because he

30James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 389.
31James's reply to a questionnaire, The Letters of William James, II, 213.
32Ibid.
33The word 'subjective,' as it is used here, is not contrapo­posed to the word 'objective.' It seems to suggest inwardness, and the term, 'subjective unity,' seems to refer to a personal consciousness of some kind.
34Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Briefer Version, p. 163.
needed God. In reply to a question which asked if he believed because he experienced God's presence, James wrote: "No, but rather because I need it so that it 'must' be true."\(^35\) According to Ralph Barton Perry, James needed God and religion as "a reenforcement of the moral will."\(^36\)

While James disclaimed any mystical experience of God on his own part, he admitted that he was influenced in his belief by the testimony of the countless people who had been gifted with mystical intuition and by "the whole tradition of religious people, to which something in me makes admiring response."\(^37\) He felt that the fact that he could respond so sympathetically to people who did claim to have experienced God's presence indicated that there was perhaps a germ of mysticism even in him. "The whole line of testimony on this point is so strong that I am unable to pooh-pooh it away. No doubt there is a germ in me of something similar that makes response."\(^38\)

William James classed himself as a supernaturalist—not a refined supernaturalist but a crass one. In contrast with refined supernaturalism which bars ideal entities from interfering causally in the course of phenomenal events, the crass


\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 214.
supernaturalism to which James professed allegiance "admits miracles and providential leadings, and finds no intellectual difficulty in mixing the ideal and the real worlds together by interpolating influences from the ideal region among the forces that causally determine the real world's details." In James's mind, the empirical world had to be somehow different in consequence of God's existence. It seemed incredible to him that no concrete particular of experience should alter its complexion in consequence of God's being there. James felt that the world viewed religiously must be concretely different from a purely materialistic universe. Although he was not sure what all the concrete facts constituting the differences are, he was sure that the influx of energy which people experience in the faith-state and the prayer-state is one of them. He was certain that in such states, something ideal actually exerts an influence on man, raises the level of his personal energy, and produces regenerative effects unattainable in other ways.

The whole drift of my education goes to persuade me that the world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds of consciousness that exist, and those other worlds must contain experiences which have a meaning for our life also; and that although in the main their experiences and those of this world keep discrete, yet the two become continuous at certain points, and higher

39 Once again, the meaning of the word 'ideal' is not immediately evident. Apparently, however, an 'ideal world' in this context does not mean one that is merely conceptual. The term seems to refer to that unseen world which is the object of our religious aspirations.

40 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 392.
energies filter in. By being faithful in my poor measure to this over-belief, I seem to myself to keep more sane and true. I can, of course, put myself into the sectarian scientist’s attitude, and imagine vividly that the world of sensations and of scientific laws and objects may be all. But whenever I do this, I hear that inward monitor of which W. K. Clifford once wrote, whispering the word 'bosh!' Humbug is humbug, even though it bear the scientific name, and the total expression of human experience, as I view it objectively, invincibly urges me beyond the narrow 'scientific' bounds. Assuredly, the real world is of a different temperament,—more intricately built than physical science allows. So my objective and my subjective conscience both hold me to the over-belief which I express. Who knows whether the faithfulness of individuals here below to their own poor over-beliefs may not actually help God in turn to be more effectively faithful to his own greater tasks?41

The over-beliefs of most religious people, as James pointed out, include belief in some kind of life after death. In James's early manhood, however, his belief in immortality was never very strong. What was important to him was that his ideals would be cared for in eternity, not necessarily that he would be around to see to the matter himself. But as he grew older his faith in immortality grew stronger. In response to the question, "Why?", he wrote, "Because I am just getting fit to live."42

In 1904, James wrote the following to his friend Carl Stumpf: "I never felt the rational need of immortality. . . but as I grow older I confess that I feel the practical need of it much more than I ever did before; and that combines with

41 Ibid., p. 391.
42 James's reply to a questionnaire, The Letters of William James, II, 214.
Indeed as James grew older he began to feel even a rational need for immortality, for death began to appear to him as a senseless waste, the inexplicable negation of goodness. Writing to his friend, Miss Frances R. Morse, in 1904 about the death of Sarah Whitman, James said: "Everything in this beautiful world is good except old age and death if one supposes no 'behind the veil' of any kind." 44

The religious faith of William James was truly the mature faith of a reflective man. It was not the blind belief with which a less speculative person might accept without question something handed down to him by others. On the contrary, William James examined the issues, assessed the evidence, considered the stakes and, in spite of the lack of proof, deliberately espoused the religious hypothesis. The man, who in his youth had felt the need to believe in God but whose scientific bias had made accepting anything without proof extremely difficult, came to see that his very need to believe was in a matter this momentous sufficient warrant for doing so. He came to realize, too, that the very presence of the need for God could very well be an indication that the Divinity needed exists.

In William James's opinion, the need for God and the need to believe in him are universal needs—exigencies of the whole human race. Religious faith, he said, is essential not only

43 Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Briefer Version, p. 268.
44 Ibid., p. 269.
to the well-being of every individual but to the perfection of the world as a whole. For the perfection of the world requires that each man pursue that which is good in life with courage, enthusiasm, and heroic generosity. In the view of James, however, virtues of heroic proportions are possible only to men of religious faith. Hence, James asserted that religion is man's most important function in the world. And inspired by a desire to do his best for the world, as well as for the God with whom he shared a common concern for goodness, James undertook, as his own distinctively religious task, that of making men realize that by being faithful to their religious beliefs, by living in the light of their religious faith, they could make their greatest contributions to the universe. In the following excerpt from a letter to Miss Frances R. Morse, William James explained the religious purpose which motivated him in writing *The Varieties of Religious Experience*:

. . . the problem I have set myself is a hard one: first, to defend (against all the prejudices of my "class") "experience" against "philosophy" as being the real backbone of the world's religious life—I mean prayer, guidance, and all that sort of thing immediately and privately felt, as against high and noble general views of our destiny and the world's meaning; and second, to make the hearer or reader believe, what I myself invincibly do believe, that, although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), yet the life of it as a whole is mankind's most important function. A task well-nigh impossible, I fear, and in which I shall fail; but to attempt it is my religious act.45

45 *The Writings of William James*, pp. 740-41.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Marilyn McCluskey has been read and approved by members of the Department of Philosophy.

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

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 12, 1972
Date

[Signature of Advisor]