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William James: The Mystical Experimentation of a Sick Soul

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Abstract: Especially in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James developed the polar categories of healthy-minded individuals content with their once-born religion versus sick souls who need to become twice-born in order to find religious peace. Biographers of James have concluded that he does not fit well under either of his polar categories. Drawing on both data about James' life and on his philosophical and theological writings, I demur from the biographers' conclusion and instead advance the thesis that the overall pattern of William James' life is best understood as a sick soul searching for—and ultimately finding—twice-born religion in connection with mystical experiences. Notably, James attempted to theorize about mystical experiences as connecting with divine reality/ies in naturalistic ways compatible with scientific knowledge of his time. Scientific knowledge today makes it more difficult to find evidence of direct divine input in religious experiences, yet one might find value in religious experiences in terms of James' pragmatic criterion for truth: their beneficial or adaptive effects.

Keywords: compounding of consciousnesses; healthy-minded religion; monism; mystical experience; the sick soul; the subliminal; William James

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1. Introduction

William James stands as one of the founders of modern psychology, with his *Principles of Psychology* still a standard today, and as a prime founder of pragmatism, the only major "made-in-America" philosophical movement. James also became a major theorist and philosopher of religion, especially noted for giving the prestigious Gifford Lectures on natural theology during 1901–1902, published in 1902 as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In that work, James distinguishes between the religiously healthy-minded soul versus the sick soul. Drawing upon both details of James' life and his writings in the philosophy of religion, I will advance the thesis that, even with its many ups and downs, the overall pattern of William James' life is best understood as a sick soul searching for—and ultimately finding—twice-born religion in connection with mystical experiences. I will also document how James maintains that mystical (and other religious experiences) can be compatible with the scientific knowledge of his time.

My thesis runs counter to the conclusions of James' major biographers. The most significant include the classic *The Thought and Character of William James* by Ralph Barton Perry (1935) and biographies by W. B. Lewis (1991), Gerald E. Myers (1986), and Lloyd Morris (1950), as well as G. William Barnard's *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (1997). This conclusion appears to be a commonplace still with purchase: David A. Dilworth very recently stated that "James was famously neither" [healthy-minded nor a sick-soul] (Dilworth 2023, p. 384). While utilizing information and insights from those and other capable biographers, this article will differ from most of these works in its primary focus on James' mystical inclinations and from all of them in forging new directions on how James' life was influenced in a mystical vein. Crucially, as suggested above, it will frame James' mystical journey with reference to his own polar categories of healthy-minded individuals content with their once-born religion versus sick souls who need to become twice-born in order to find religious peace. Perry concludes

that James' character "escapes simple formulation" (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 670), including healthy-mindedness versus soul-sickness that reaches twice-born status. Perry reasons that James' life manifested many crises and recoveries, rather than a simple "before/after" dichotomy (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 671). Myers for his part labels James as a category breaker whose life more or less equally combined both poles of various binaries, including optimism/pessimism and joy/sadness (Myers 1986, pp. 41, 469). Myers, however, does not consider that the sick soul or "divided self"—a term also frequently invoked by James—often already mixes optimism and pessimism. Therefore, after tracing James' derivation and use of the categories, I will advance the thesis that, even with its many ups and downs, the overall pattern of William James' life is best understood as a sick soul searching for—and ultimately finding—twice-born religion in connection with mystical experiences.

James borrowed the terms "once born" and "twice born" from Francis W. Newman's *The Soul: Its Sorrows and Its Aspirations* (Myers 1986, p. 608, n. 55). Newman characterized the once-born religious believer as possessing a child-like happiness and as comfortable with how that belief made sense of, and helped one cope with, evil (Myers 1986, p. 486). James first employs Newman's pair, and especially the related "sick soul", in his introduction as the editor of *The Literary Remains of the Late Henry James*, an 1885 anthology of some of his father's later writings (Morris 1950, p. 57). James regarded his Calvinist father as "'all sicklied o'er' with a sense of weakness" until he surrendered himself to God (Lewis 1991, pp. 354–56).

In *Literary Remains*, James states that potentially every person could succumb to soul-sickness, like his father had before his "second birth". However, several years later in an article entitled, "Is Life Worth Living?" James expounds that many people are constitutionally inclined towards either a pessimistic or optimistic temperament (James 1956, pp. 33–35). James' interpretation of his own bouts with depression as arising solely or primarily from physiological causes (Myers 1986, pp. 49–50) likely influenced this belief that different individuals have a nature more or less pessimistic (with many others more or less equally prone to periods of "radiance" or "dreariness" (James 1956, p. 34)). Of course, James recognized that one's experiences and one's own resolve would affect to what extent a person might succumb to a pessimistic outlook. I will soon write more on this as I explore the biographical factors that figure into James' "soul-sickness", into a radical sense of "wrongness" (James 1902, p. 209) in himself and in the world.

2. James' Physical and Mental Health

The first factor to consider is James' poor health as a young man and then later in life. Though his two younger brothers enlisted in the Union Army, his frailty apparently excused him from joining them (Lewis 1991, p. 119; Perry 1935, vol. 1, p. 202, vol. 2, p. 672; Myers 1986, p. 31). Interrupting his medical studies in 1865 for the Thayer Expedition in biology to Brazil, James unfortunately contracted varioloid, a mild form of smallpox. Upon his recovery, he wrote that "his coming was a mistake", opining that he apparently was "cut out for a speculative rather than active life" (Lewis 1991, p. 174). He did, though, end up staying in Brazil for a full year. However, the disease proved responsible for significant eye fatigue even with normal use, which persisted for years and returned intermittently for the rest of his life (Perry 1935, vol. 1, p. 220). In addition to the eye problems, insomnia, digestive difficulties, and back trouble made for a protracted period of ill health, from 1867–1873, during which James made recuperative visits to Germany and Italy (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 672; Barnard 1997, p. xiii). While he gradually improved over the subsequent five years and then had no debilitating bouts with illness for the next twenty years, all of the just-mentioned conditions save back strain did periodically afflict him. In 1898, at the age of 56, he suffered a heart attack, which weakened him for the remaining twelve years of his life (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 672).

Given James' experiences with ill health, did they contribute to his soul-sickness? In his chapter on the sick soul in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James' explicitly addresses how disease (and death) contribute to soul-sickness in contrast to the healthy-minded soul

who unreasonably brushes them off: "The fact that we *can* die, the fact that we *can* be ill at all, is what perplexes us. We need a life not correlated with death, a health not liable to illness, a kind of good that will not perish" (James 1902, p. 140).

While poor physical health then contributed to James' soul-sickness, his mental health figured even more prominently, especially his proneness to melancholy and depression. Indeed, the two interacted: Perry notes that James harbored "tendencies of hypochondria" (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 681), as his "neurasthenia" led him "to exaggerate his illness" (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 673). Howard Feinstein, a psychiatrist biographer of James, for his part suggests psychosomatic causes for much of James' physical illness (Feinstein 1984, p. 89ff). Feinstein locates the root cause of James' psychological struggles in his relationship with his father, who wanted William to lead a scientific career, despite James' artistic and philosophical interests (Feinstein 1984, p. 117ff). Feinstein notes the commonness of "neurasthenia" (no longer regarded as a valid medical diagnosis) in James' family and in the wider society of the time, understood as fatigue caused by exhaustion of the nervous system (Feinstein 1984, pp. 183–84).

James' worst extended bout with depression occurred upon his return from studies in Germany and lasted around five years, during 1868–1874 (Morris 1950, p. 56; Barnard 1997, p. xiii; Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 673). Less severe depression periodically beset James for the remainder of his life. A letter to a friend indicates that James felt suicidal as early as 1866 (Strout 1970, p. 495). For a time in 1870, James seriously contemplated suicide.

At this point, I will document James' struggle with the issue of suicide, both personally and from his philosophical perspectives over time. In the depths of this depression of 1870, James came to feel that suicide constituted "the only action available to the impotent will" (Lewis 1991, p. 205). His coming out of that depression correlated with a change of opinion concerning free will (the extent of a causal connection of course is debatable). Upon reading the neo-Kantian French philosopher Charles Renouvier, James agreed that humans do indeed have some freedom to choose which thoughts to entertain and which beliefs to hold. As he wrote in his diary, "My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will" (Myers 1986, p. 46). And with this decision he understood himself as having made the choice not to commit suicide. While never abandoning his confidence in the potential efficacy of free choice and action—a key component of his later pragmatism, James did come to a more complex view about suicide over the years. In "Is Life Worth Living?", first delivered as a speech in 1895, James takes seriously and sympathetically those whom temperament and circumstance push toward suicide:

> 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. We, too, as we sit here in our comfort must 'ponder these things' also, for we are of one substance with these suicides, and their life is the life we share. The plainest intellectual integrity—nay more, the simplest manliness and honor, forbid us to forget their case. (James 1956, p. 37)

In an 1896 letter, James responded to a letter from Paul Blood, wherein Blood related his own pondering of the advantages of suicide, after having perused James' "Is Life Worth Living?". In that response James ventured, "I take it that no man is educated who has never dallied with the thought of suicide" (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 231). The Blood letter frames suicide more as an intellectual issue rather than as something he felt some compulsion to attempt. And James certainly recognized the negativities of life that can raise the question of suicide on the intellectual level. Indeed, in "Is Life Worth Living?", James distinguishes between suicide as "the result of insanity or sudden frenzied impulse" and the pessimism that can result from philosophical and religious reflection on the negativities of life (James 1956, pp. 38–41). In this same letter to Blood, James regards suicide as resulting from "fear of life". He then goes on to claim that impulse, but not reason, can overcome such fear (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 231). His own periodic bouts with depression—and a sense of regeneration coming from outside himself, more about which I will write later—led James

to the conclusion that one's own free resolve was just one factor in cases of depression and suicide.

Another important piece of evidence supporting James as a religious sick soul comes from an example he offers in the sick-soul chapter of *Varieties*, the sole example of what he labels "the worst form of melancholy, which takes the form of panic fear" (James 1902, pp. 159–60). While he attributes the experience to a Frenchman, a letter to Frank Abauzit, the French translator of *Varieties*, confirms the autobiographical nature of James' report (Richardson 2006, p. 572, n. 2): "suddenly there fell upon me without any warning, just as if it came out of the darkness, a horrible fear of my own existence" (James 1902, p. 160). Then, with the image of a pathetic epileptic patient in his mind, he "became a mass of quivering fear" at the thought that he could easily become like that person. He continues, "After this the universe was changed for me altogether. I awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach, and with a sense of the insecurity of life that I never knew before, and that I have never felt since" (James 1902, p. 160). The writer, whom we know to be James, concludes: "I have always thought that this experience of melancholia of mine had a religious bearing" (James 1902, p. 161).

Lewis has noted James' self-proclaimed tendencies towards passivity and spectatorship (Lewis 1991, pp. 205–6), as in James' above comment upon his setback in Brazil. Indeed, in the depths of his worst depression, James unsurprisingly wallowed in passivity. His decision on free will mentioned just above represented a commitment to action. But in the background of this decision, I suspect, lay a proclivity to action and creativity, which ran deep in James' temperament and personality. Indeed, I will just below argue from his observations of human volatility and of his own great impatience, as well as from the record of his life, that James had manic tendencies as well. In using the term "tendencies", I acknowledge that I am not in a position historically or professionally to make a clinical diagnosis of bipolar disorder. I will comment that I have my own mood swings—sometimes feeling happy, enthusiastic, confident, other times feeling somewhat "down", blasé, or discouraged. And I think it is uncontroversial to add that most people recognize such swings in themselves. I believe I stand on safe ground in claiming that James had more frequent and wider mood swings than the average person. Interestingly, a letter by James from his first semester as a Harvard undergraduate, depicts himself as "surging between elation when a letter arrived from home and gloom when the mailbox was empty" (Feinstein 1984, p. 156).

What then supports my claim that James' pattern of action manifests manic tendencies? First of all, apart from those times that depression hampered him, James was a hard worker, throwing himself into his projects, often over-working himself given his various ailments—and, as Perry observes, James' overwork contributed to some of these ailments (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 672). He wrote and lectured prolifically. At the same time, after laboring hard on an endeavor for a while, he became bored and looked for the next adventure to throw himself into. James once penned, "My *flux*-philosophy may well have to do with my extremely impatient temperament. I am a motor, need change, and get very quickly bored" (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 677). Looking at his writing quantitatively, book-length manuscripts pale before the multitude of articles and mini-books. His frequent travels abroad and stateside constitute another manifestation of this need for change and novel action to ward off boredom. So does his aversion to proofreading after finishing an article, lecture, or book (Perry 1935, vol. 2, pp. 677–78). Moreover, his career path suggests his roving eye for the next project to seize upon, even with the concession that his scientific endeavors stemmed from trying to please his father rather than himself: from medicine to teaching physiology to psychology to philosophy. Some of his observations about the volatility of human nature also invite the interpretation that James projects some of his own character into his generalizations. In addition to those temperamental optimists and pessimists, James recognizes something of himself as he describes "what is called 'circular insanity'", where "phases of melancholy succeed phases of mania, with no outward cause which we can discover; and often enough to one and the same well person life will present

incarnate radiance to-day and incarnate dreariness to-morrow" (James 1956, p. 34). Also, in his chapter, "The Divided Self", in *Varieties*, James distinguishes two types of people: those "born with an inner constitution which is harmonious and well-balanced" and those with inconsistent or discordant personalities, this latter group varying from modest inconsistency to a "heterogeneity" that makes their existence "little more than a series of zigzags, as now one tendency and now another gets the upper hand" (James 1902, pp. 168–69). Finally, Myers marvels at the prodigious quantity of writing over the last ten years or so of James' life, as compared with earlier decades (Myers 1986, pp. 13–15). His sense of impending mortality helped spur James on. Nevertheless, the fact that he accomplished all this with a weakened heart (today known as congestive heart disease, not to mention at least two bouts with depression) suggests to me some manic-like energy. Not only the quantity but the quality of James' work—its creativity, interdisciplinarity, and metaphorical imaginativeness—suggest possible manic tendencies. Psychologist Kay Redfield Jamison (1996) has demonstrated that the early stages of mania involve rapid thought processes and the expanding of categories beyond their normal limits.

Do James' creative and restless activity and manic tendencies, punctuated with feelings of greater or lesser melancholy, support his being a sick soul in need of healing, or do they instead represent a healthy-mindedness balancing his soul-sickness? One argument supporting soul-sickness would regard James' inordinate proclivity to boredom as an inability to sufficiently appreciate "animal", natural, and intellectual goods, losing interest long before their "freshness date" has expired. More telling, and directly drawing on James' writings, is the fact that in his chapter, "The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness" in *Varieties*, James never associates healthy-mindedness with taking action to lessen evil in the world. This should not surprise in that for James the healthy-minded minimize the reality of evil. Moreover, he indicates that rather than rule-driven moral conduct, the healthy-minded mind-cure movements of his day rely on surrender, relaxation, and passivity in the acceptance of certain ideas, such as in the power of positive thinking (James 1902, pp. 109–20).

Last but not least, some of James' philosophical and theological speculation—and struggle—indicate his soul-sickness. Cartesian anxiety often reveals itself in an attempt to find truth or meaning on one side or the other of Cartesian dualism—in either idealism or materialism. Though James' later pragmatism represented an overcoming of such dualism, he was first plagued by skepticism of a materialistic reductive sort. Indeed, thoughts that his choices and actions might stem wholly from antecedent physical conditions compounded his youthful depression (Myers 1986, p. 388). Such thoughts arose from his reading, as forms of reductive physicalism had currency among scholars of the time, as well as from his own study of physiology.

Later, James fought the idealistic horn of dualism especially in the form of a monism that compelled one to imagine that evils stemmed necessarily from the Absolute will. James never endorsed—indeed railed against—such idealism. In conjunction with his above reflections upon life's negativities, James identified a religious impulse—we might add, an impulse especially of a sick soul seeking healing—to reconcile the tension between an intuition or a hope and an observation. (1) Nature issues from a good divine source. (2) Nature is imperfect—indeed, it includes great evil (James 1956, pp. 40–44). Monism maximizes—indeed absolutizes—the first, while denying the second. James will have none of this, for him, simplistic denial of evil. Rather, to refuse the obvious, to call evil good, capitulates to evil instead of fighting it. Thus, monism "maximize(s) evil" "based on the persuasion that the evil aspects of our life are of its very essence" (James 1902, pp. 130–31). In this connection, Mark C. Taylor in his book *After God* interprets James quite differently: he identifies James' concept of healthy-minded religion with monism (Taylor 2007, p. 37). James, however, concludes that healthy-mindedness does not brook the notion of evil as finally rational, to be justified and preserved by inclusion in the divine, but rather minimizes it as something to be "negated" and hopefully "forgotten" (James 1902, pp. 132–33; see also James 1956, p. 46). Of course, for James, the healthy-minded

seriously underestimate the extent of evil. But healthy-minded religion and non-monistic religion usually do not deny evil's reality.

None of this means, though, that James did not feel the pull of monism. James held that a viable theism for his time required a strong pantheistic element—the transcendent verging on dualistic God of classical theism did not constitute a viable option. Though he opted for "pluralism" over "monism" when forced to choose, he felt a strong attraction for a very inclusive God—just as long as this divine did not envelop everything, which James believed would make it responsible for evil. Indeed, as James "look(s) back over my own experiences" related to mysticism, he exults in *Varieties*:

> It is as if the opposites of the world whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity. Not only do they, as contrasted species, belong to one and the same genus, but *one of the species*, the nobler and better one, *is itself the genus, and so soaks up and absorbs its opposite into itself*. (James 1902, p. 388; cf. Barnard 1997, p. 29)

We just need to clarify that for James this divine reality does not absorb evil qua evil into itself! And, as suggested above, James shared with monists the sense that the tension between a good God as the strongest force in the world and the manifest evils of that world needed to find a resolution. Indeed, if sick souls or divided selves could not find an adequate reconciliation, twice-born healing would be impossible. Therefore, James' vehement—and I believe correct—denunciation of popular monistic philosophies of his age also manifested some internal debate, as James argued against parts of himself.

Sick souls seek a rebirth or conversion that assures them of the meaningfulness of (their) life. But James' first conversion through his acceptance of Renouvier's defense of free will was hardly a graduation into the ranks of the twice-born. Given his tendency to throw himself into work and activity, the nature of this first rebirth should not surprise us. But at this point James, in attempting to pick himself up by his moral bootstraps, strives to be a healthy-minded soul, according to Morris (58). Morris has at least one point correct: James is still far from a second birth. For James' attitude diverges from the optimism of the healthy-minded or once-born: In extreme Kantian fashion, he regards the good will as the one good reality in a world that otherwise may be mostly or entirely evil. He posits in his diary that:

> A militant existence in which the ego is posited as a monad, with the *good* as its end, and the final consolation only that of irreconcilable hatred—though evil slay me, she can't subdue me, or make me worship her. The brute force is all at her command, but the final protest of my soul as she squeezes me out of existence gives me still in a certain sense the superiority (Perry 1935, vol. 1, pp. 322–23).

In the same diary entry, James raises the question of the relationship of good and evil "in the total process of the universe" (Perry 1935, vol. 1, p. 322). But, at this point, James does not harbor any strong sense of affirmation of one of the tensions that the twice-born must reconcile, namely that a good divine power stands behind nature.

Feinstein downplays the significance of James' initial encounter with Renouvier's writing, questioning whether it constituted a conversion (Feinstein 1984, pp. 307–11). Consonant with the timeline of James' youthful depression above, Feinstein is correct that this encounter with Renouvier did not result in any sudden, dramatic relief from James' physical and mental health problems. Nevertheless, I would contend that an 1873 conversation between William and his father Henry, Sr., about William's improved health, recorded by his father and cited by Feinstein, actually supports the importance of Renouvier (Feinstein 1984, p. 311). It is to the reading of Renouvier (and Wordsworth) that William credits his rejection of the notion that mental disorder is determined solely by physiological causes and the concomitant affirmation that the mind can have causal influence in its own right. As I will explicate later, his response to Renouvier has a causal connection to this rejection of physiological determinism. James' "fear of madness" based on his family's history of mental illness, as noted by Feinstein (1984, p. 304), focused and increased

James' prior fear that physiology was destiny. Feinstein reports upon the literature of James' time that stipulates that personal attitudes and moral inclinations develop not solely from momentary decisions but also from habitual actions, as moral habits form. He further observes that James knew about and endorsed that stipulation (Feinstein 1984). (Thus, neither James nor we should expect that his decisive response to Renouvier would suddenly result in a dramatic improvement in James' mental and physical health.) This acknowledgment by James, however, does not at all deny the absolute cruciality for James of the belief that free will plays some causal role in psychological states and moral attitudes and actions. And James' encounter with Renouvier represents his initial decision to believe in such a concept of free will.

Action then figures in both James' soul-sickness and his first (not fully successful) attempts to overcome it. This trope of action will ultimately play a role in James' second birth of the soul, insofar as he will sometimes cultivate mystical-type experiences and will seek out such experiences of others, as well as strive intellectually to find a religious and metaphysical outlook conducive to a second birth. Here, I will note the centrality of action for James' epistemology. James breaks from enlightenment paradigms in emphasizing that knowing is first of all and always an activity. Whatever knowledge we gain involves—perforce and rightly—our subjective orientation and our purposes. Moreover, our action factors in the creation of some of the values we come to know. Furthermore, that knowledge is action ties into another important facet of James' soul-sickness and its resolution: his empirical and experiential bent. Truth is known through experience—whether scientific, psychological, or religious.

In the above section, then, I believe I have demonstrated James' soul-sickness, scrutinizing his physical and mental health as well as his philosophical reflection stemming directly from that soul-sickness. This soul-sickness encouraged James to seek or accentuate certain types of experience.

3. Personal Experiences and the Mystical

This section explores personal experiences of James relevant to his interests in religion and in mysticism, and relevant to his hope to overcome his soul-sickness: (1) intuitions of goodness, both of particulars as well as of life as a whole, and of a good divine power as the principal source of the world; (2) experimentation with nitrous oxide—on the whole positive, encouraged by a publication by Benjamin Paul Blood—which represented experimentation with James' own states of consciousness; (3) negative religious and mystical or quasi-mystical experiences; (4) experiences of nature from childhood on, as well as a profound experience of 1898 best classified as an instance of nature mysticism; (5) experiences of resurgence, seemingly from beyond, ameliorating or ending periods of depression; and (6) several reminiscences and a dream that became notable to James late in his life.

We have seen James remark on the imperfection of nature, which is nevertheless a manifestation of the divine. After he had escaped his youthful bouts of depression, however, James did come to credit his intuitions of the overall goodness of nature. The religious imagination could sense this in particular displays:

> It is the terror and beauty of phenomena, the 'promise' of the dawn and of the rainbow, the 'voice' of the thunder, the 'gentleness' of the summer rain, the 'sublimity' of the stars, and not the physical laws which these things follow, by which the religious mind still continues to be most impressed (James 1902, p. 498).

James goes on to generalize about "faith states", using the language of psychologist James Leuba. He characterizes these states as psychological and biological. He approvingly quotes Leuba: "Not God, but life, more life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life, is, in the last analysis, the end of religion. The love of life, at any and every level of development, is the religious impulse" (James 1902, p. 507). In keeping with his pragmatism, James sees value in such positive feelings or intuitions, quite apart from the question of their truth. But going further (as he leads into the previous quote), James fashions an argument that our subjective feelings (always in correlation with things in the world), as concrete instantiations of reality,

may have as much or more purchase on truth than abstract, scientific, objective thought (James 1902, pp. 497–503). Indeed, another aspect of his pragmatism supports the insight or intuition that the world is after all amenable to our subjectivity. As James puts it in "Reflex Action and Theism":

> And the miracle of miracles, a miracle not yet exhaustively cleared up by any philosophy, is that the given order lends itself to the remodeling. It shows itself plastic to many of our scientific, to many of our aesthetic, to many of our practical purposes and ends.
>
> When the man of affairs, the artist, or the man of science fails, he is not rebutted. He tries again. He says the impressions of sense *must* give way, *must* be reduced to their desiderated form. They all postulate in the interests of their volitional nature a harmony between the latter and the nature of things (James 1956, pp. 119–20).

I will make a final point. James, of course, famously proclaims that our moral and spiritual efforts may make a difference in the fulfillment of higher purposes. At the same time, James asserts a conduciveness of the universe to our moral and religious nature:

> If this be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success, it is no better than a game of private theatricals. But it *feels* like a real fight—as if there were something really wild in the universe which we, with all our idealities and faithfulnesses, are needed to redeem; and first of all to redeem our own hearts from atheisms and fears. For such a half-wild, half-saved universe our nature is adapted. (James 1956, p. 61)

James likewise harbored intuitions that a good God is likely behind this on-the-whole good world. While James refers to the believer in general, he surely counts himself as one in such a "question(s) as God": "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" (James 1956, p. 95). Almost thirty years after those words from "The Sentiment of Rationality" first appeared, James indicates that the evidence from several fields, while not yet conclusive—still more or less in the realm of intimation and intuition, leans towards belief in the divine, now as a wider consciousness containing our own experiences: "Not only psychic research, but metaphysical philosophy, and speculative biology are led in their own ways to look with favor on some such 'panpsychic' view of the universe as this" (James [1911] 1941, p. 204).

In 1874, Benjamin Paul Blood self-published the pamphlet *The Anaesthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy*, wherein he reported his experience with nitrous oxide and his interpretation thereof—the substance recently having gained popularity for patients undergoing dental surgery. Intrigued, James penned a review for the *Atlantic Monthly* later that year (James 1874). The allure lingered and James in the early 1880′s engaged in his own experimentation with nitrous oxide. In the *Atlantic* piece, James had compared Blood's "mystical" experience unfavorably "with the intoxication of moral volition". But his own use led him to a more nuanced and, in important respects, a more positive view. In *Varieties*, James contrasts "public opinion" regarding "intoxicants and anaesthetics" with "private practice and certain lyric strains of poetry [that] seem still to bear witness to its ideality" (James 1902, pp. 386–87). James then highlights "especially nitrous oxide, when sufficiently diluted with air, [as] stimulat(ing) the mystical consciousness in an extraordinary degree" (James 1902, p. 387). Referring to these experiments, James relates that they convinced him that "rational" or "ordinary" consciousness constituted just one form of consciousness—and by implication reality. Thus, nitrous oxide anaesthetization served as a gateway to, or even as a type of, mystical experience.

On the other hand, James underwent negative experiences with nitrous oxide as well (cf. Barnard 1997, pp. 26–28). He expounds upon this in an extended "Note" at the end of "On Some Hegelianisms", originally published in *Mind* in April 1882. Such negative effects occurred with "prolonged" inhalation (James 1956, p. 298). (From James' above remark in *Varieties*, one can surmise that the effect would come more quickly with nitrous oxide insufficiently diluted with air.) Besides "incipient nausea", such overdosing brought

an "instantaneous revulsion of mood from rapture to horror", which James characterizes as, "perhaps, the strongest emotion I have ever experienced". This entailed "a pessimistic fatalism, depth within depth of impotence and indifference, reason and silliness united in the fact that whichever you choose it is all one" (James 1956, pp. 297–98). What repulsed James most was exactly what he disliked about monism: that snowstorm that makes all cows white, that which denatures all finite particularities (including as we have seen evil, whitewashing it as good). This left James with "the sense of a dreadful and ineluctable fate, with whose magnitude every finite effort is incommensurable and in the light of which whatever happens is indifferent" (James 1956, p. 297). James' "Note" scandalized some philosophers (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 674) by analogizing "both the strength and weakness of Hegel's philosophy" (James 1956, p. 294) to the ups and downs of a drug-induced state of alternative consciousness: first the rapturous feeling of unity and reconciliation, then the dismissive realization of a horrifying indifferentism. (In *Varieties*, James appears more charitable towards Hegel vis-à-vis mystical-type experiences: Addressing the feeling of reconciliation, he pens, "I feel as if it must mean something, something like what the hegelian philosophy means, if one could only lay hold of it more clearly" (James 1902, p. 388).) We can discern an interesting parallel between the negative side of nitrous oxide intoxication and the negative side of the "equanimity" or "tranquil-mindedness" that accompanies "saintliness" (often with religious experience in the background), as described in *Varieties* (James 1902, pp. 284–85): In those of a more pessimistic nature, it takes the form "more of resignation and submission" rather than "joyous consent". Such "self-surrendering submissiveness" in its own way devalues finite particularity—in this case that of the self. Not surprisingly James finds "something pathetic and fatalistic about this" (James 1902, pp. 285–86).

Thus, James recognizes negative aspects of drug-induced and even religious mystical states. While he does observe in *Varieties* that persons open to mystical states of consciousness often are also vulnerable to pathological states, indeed, that the combination of "superior intellect and a psychopathic temperament" best conduces to religious genius (James 1902, pp. 22–25), he forges a typological distinction between "religious" and "*diabolical*" mysticism (James 1902, p. 426). These latter states typical of mental illness—involving pessimism, desolation, and dread—share with positive mystical experiences the same site of origin, namely the subliminal, according to James (1902, p. 426). James' melancholic experience described earlier, attributed to a Frenchman, can be classified under the diabolical type. I would draw the following conclusions about the significance of these negative mystical-like experiences for James: (1) They contribute to the purported evidence for states of consciousness other than the ordinary states, states which provide some basis for belief in extraordinary realities (James 1902, p. 427). (2) Such negative experiences testify to the depth of evil and drive sick souls, like James, to seek a second birth.

In *Varieties*, James intones that "certain aspects of nature seem to have a peculiar power of awakening mystical moods" (James 1902, p. 394). He enjoyed trips to woods and ocean as a child. Several of his letters as a young adult reveal a deep appreciation of nature (Perry 1935, vol. 1, pp. 220–21, 242, 327), including some that proclaim the spiritual salubrity of experiencing nature, as in the following: "It takes all the wrinkles and puckers out of you and washes you whole again, filling you with courage, and independence of what may happen in the future" (Perry 1935, vol. 1, pp. 348–49; see also vol. 1, p. 350). James' own mystical-type experience of nature occurred many years later, in 1898, in the Adirondack Mountains. In a letter to his wife Alice, he highlights its noetic and even more its ineffable aspect (cf. Barnard 1997, p. 20):

> I spent a good deal of it in the woods, where the streaming moonlight lit up things in a magical checkered play, and it seemed as if the Gods of all the nature-mythologies were holding an indescribable meeting in my breast with the moral Gods of the inner life. The intense significance of some sort, of the whole scene, if one could only *tell* the significance. It was one of the happiest lonesome nights of my existence, and I understand now what a poet is. He is a person who can feel

> the immense complexity of influences that I felt, and make some partial tracks in them for verbal statement. In point of fact I can't find a single word for all that significance. (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 676)

Notably, James finishes this report with a reference to his upcoming Gifford Lectures (published as *Varieties*): "Doubtless in more ways than one, though, things in the Edinburgh lectures will be traceable to [this experience]" (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 676). Additionally, Barnard mentions that James, in his *Talk to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*, recommends immersion in nature on the level of pure sense experience, in order that one might receive a reinvigorating mystical (like) experience, when life has lost its zest (Barnard 1997, p. 74).

A feeling of resurgence, not under one's control—in that James attributed this at least partially to the realm of the subliminal—constituted another type of experience related to mysticism. Myers in particular accentuates the nature and importance of such for James personally, describing these feelings as "regenerative experiences in which a sudden, surprising resurgence of energy occurred in the midst of a pathological apathy or *anhedonia* so pervasive that he felt that life was worthless. To regain one's energy in such circumstance is like gift from heaven, James felt" (Myers 1986, p. 472). Indeed, James devoted an article to this topic, entitled "The Energies of Men", published originally in *Philosophical Review* in 1907. In that work, James analyzes the phenomenon as far as he can both physiologically and mentally (James [1911] 1941, pp. 229–61). Finally, James turns his attention to prayer, commenting on the skepticism of most medical and scientific minds: "Few can carry on any living commerce with 'God'" (James [1911] 1941, pp. 261–62). He finishes, "Part of the imperfect vitality under which we labor can thus be easily explained. One part of our mind dams up—even *damns* up!—the other parts" (James [1911] 1941, p. 262).

Finally, I examine three reminiscences and a dream—or a series or concatenation of dreams—from late in his life, during 1906, which James believed connected him to a larger field of consciousness via the subconscious. James describes the characteristics shared by the three reminiscences in "A Suggestion about Mysticism", originally published in the *Journal of Philosophy* in 1910:

> What happened each time was that I seemed all at once to be reminded of a past experience; and this reminiscence, ere I could conceive or name it distinctly, developed into something further that belonged with it, this in turn into something further still, and so on, until the process faded out. There was a strongly exciting sense that my knowledge of past (and present?) reality was enlarging pulse by pulse, but so rapidly that my intellectual processes could not keep up the pace. The feeling—I won't call it belief—that I had had a sudden *opening*, had seen through a window, as it were, distant realities that incomprehensibly belonged with my own life, was so acute I cannot shake it off to-day. (James 1920, pp. 504–5)

Barnard correctly observes that the experiences related in "A Suggestion" are personal rather than transpersonal in content (Barnard 1997, p. 65)—at least the three reminiscences, I would add. Yet the rapid expansion of his field of consciousness courtesy of the subliminal tremendously impressed James, so much that it held for him evidential implications that the subconscious could indeed open up to divine consciousness(es) for some persons at some times.

James labeled the fourth "the most intensely peculiar experience of my whole life" (James 1920, p. 506). A dream—or better a concatenation of three dreams which mysteriously came together—engendered great confusion and then fear in James. While distinct in content and emotion, all three seemed equally "close" to him. He began to ask himself questions, notably: "*am I getting into other people's dreams*? Is this a 'telepathic' experience? Or an invasion of double (or treble) personality?" The upshot: James felt himself losing his sense of self (James 1920, pp. 507–8). In a striking image from what turned out to be his final piece on religious experience, James referred to a "mother-sea or reservoir" of "cosmic consciousness" (James [1911] 1941, p. 204). But ironically at this moment James cried inwardly,

"WHOSE [dreams]? Unless I can *attach* them, I am swept out to sea with no horizon and no bond, getting *lost*" (James 1920, p. 508). As I read James (cf. Barnard 1997, p. 66), what first brought some relief—which should not surprise us—was moral reflection, specifically, sympathizing with those "persons passing into dementia" or disassociation (James 1920, pp. 508–9). Yet he still felt concern that, should he fall back asleep, the confusion, fear, and lostness might return and even "develop farther" (James 1920, p. 509). Only when he convinced himself—for the moment—that the two intruding dreams had come from "*the midnight stratum* of my past" dreams, did James find the "great relief" that allowed him to drift back to sleep (James 1920, pp. 509–10). Shortly before awakening the next morning, he did have a concatenation of two dreams, but it brought only "a curious, but not alarming, confusion"—after which he had no more such unusual dream experiences (James 1920, p. 510). Despite the obvious negative emotions associated with this fourth occurrence, James chooses to emphasize the positive: "the sense that *reality was being uncovered* was mystical to the highest degree". James proceeds immediately to end his ruminations on this particular, peculiar experience: "To this day I feel that those extra dreams were dreamed in reality, but when, where, and by whom, I can not guess" (James 1920, p. 511). I interpret this to mean that, for James, the prospect that he had through his subconscious tapped into another's subconscious represented a very live possibility. And even if that explanation were incorrect, James still stood amazed at what he took as the ability of the subliminal to uncover extraordinary levels of reality.

We would expect that all of these above experiences of James with religious dimensions or implications would prove significant for his spiritual journey and its quest to conquer soul-sickness. As a pragmatist and empiricist, the religious or quasi-religious experiences of others would also naturally draw the attention of William James. Indeed, such experiences of others may have opened James up to some of his own experiences we have just discussed. Before mentioning some influential experiences of others, I will offer a word on James' ambivalent comments regarding his own (in)ability to have mystical experiences. In *Varieties*, James introduces the lectures on "Mysticism" by confessing that "my own constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely, and I can speak of them only at second hand" (James 1902, p. 379). In a letter to James Leuba, a denier of the validity of mystical experiences, James expands upon this disclaimer:

> I have no living sense of commerce with a God. I envy those who have, for I know that the addition of such a sense would help me greatly. The Divine, for my active life, is limited to impersonal and abstract concepts which, as ideals, interest and determine me, but do so but faintly in comparison with what a feeling of God might effect, if I had one. (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 350)

These statements tend to mislead the reader, given that both date from after his 1898 experience that can count as an instance as nature mysticism, concerning which he does allude to divine power(s). James does qualify the first disclaimer with "almost", so I will not accuse him of uttering an untruth. As Barnard declares in connection with the "Walpurgis Nacht" nature experience, "James did not consider himself a 'professional mystic'" (Barnard 1997, p. 21; James coined the latter phrase in his introductory remarks on mysticism (James 1902, p. 382)). Thus, he did not have ongoing mystical experiences nor did this particular experience—though he connected it to divine powers—count for James as certain knowledge of the reality of the divine.

James came to accredit the religious and paranormal experiences of various others. In *Varieties*, he often speaks of "religious mysticism". While James stresses the diversity of religious mystical experiences, in the sense that mystics understand quite variously the nature of the divine they claim to encounter (James 1902, pp. 424–26), he personally believes that these experiences in the mode of "direct perceptions" (James 1902, pp. 423–24) likely do connect with the divine through the subconscious. In addition, James refers to automisms in Frederic Myers' general sense. These include motor automisms, glossolalia, "automatic or semi-automatic composition" or speaking under some compulsion, as with the Hebrew prophets, visions, voices, and "rapt conditions" (James 1902, pp. 234, 478–83). In and of

themselves, automisms "undoubtedly have no spiritual significance", according to James. He utters this verdict: "On the whole, unconsciousness, convulsions, visions, involuntary vocal utterances, and suffocation, must simply be ascribed to the subject's having a large subliminal region, involving nervous instability" (James 1902, p. 251). Yet notice the qualifier "on the whole". James goes on to observe that religious mystics often have also experienced automisms (James 1902, p. 478). Thus, automisms may accompany mystical experiences even if they are not themselves direct perceptions of the divine. Furthermore, I sense that James was quite open to the possibility—even probability—that some automisms or "semi-automisms", particularly certain of those entailing religious intellectual content, issued from a direct connection with the divine (see, for example, James 1902, p. 484).

James virtually avoided in *Varieties* any references to what might today be termed the "paranormal", only briefly mentioning—in the conditional—"supra-normal cognitions" or the "telepathic" as possible expressions of the subliminal (James 1902, p. 484). However, James belonged to the Society for Psychical Research, indeed helped found the American branch of the Society, and lectured and wrote extensively on the subject. I will turn mostly to his last ruminations on the subject, originally published in October 1909, in the *American Magazine* as "Confidences of a Psychical Researcher", and later included in an anthology under the title "Final Impressions of a Psychical Researcher" (James [1911] 1941, pp. 173–226). In this article, he briefly weighs in on "physical phenomena" or what we today call "psychokinesis". He judges that "even here the balance of testimony seems slowly to be inclining" in their favor (James [1911] 1941, pp. 176–78; see also pp. 197–98), in contrast to his earlier judgment that the case for physical mediumship had "fared hard". He had offered that negative evaluation in an article entitled, "What Psychical Research Has Accomplished" (James 1960, pp. 36–37)—a portion of which was originally published almost twenty years earlier, with the final form being published in 1897 (James 1960, p. 25, n. 1).

Despite his nods to such alleged physical movements, James regards them as a "particularly crass and low type of supernatural phenomena" (James [1911] 1941, p. 178). What truly fascinates and exercises him is "supernormal" cognition or knowledge, as possessed by professional mediums and others with some form of clairvoyance. James had an intermittent professional (and at least at the time of the death of an infant son, personal) relationship with Boston medium Lenora Piper lasting well over twenty years, beginning in 1885 (see Barnard 1997, pp. 51–59). He (and other members of the Society for Psychical Research) worked extensively with her when one of their own, Richard Hodgson, died in 1905. James authored their conclusions in a lengthy report to the SPR delivered in 1909 (Barnard 1997, p. 56). James discounted any full-fledged spiritist theory wherein a deceased spirit takes the initiative to communicate directly with a medium. Information conveyed by mediums entailed too much triviality, vagueness, and inaccuracy to support such a theory in James' view. (Of course, James also believed that many or most mediums were partially or totally fraudulent, but James was convinced that Mrs. Piper was a "white crow" devoid of any intent to deceive.) Nevertheless, James had determined that mediums and clairvoyants had revealed far too many truths inexplicable in terms of ordinary cognition (James [1911] 1941, pp. 183–201). As Barnard emphasizes, already in 1896 with his essay "Psychical Research" (Barnard 1997, p. 49), James asserts: "In point of fact, the concrete evidence for most of the 'psychic' phenomena under discussion is good enough to hang a man twenty times over" (James 1986, p. 140). What then could explain such supranormal knowledge? For James telepathy or thought-transference provided an adequate explanation. Perhaps the spirits of human persons lived on and/or transpersonal superhuman, yet less than divine, powers collected their memories—and clairvoyants tapped into such consciousnesses. As to this "cosmic environment of *other consciousness* of some sort", James pleads ignorance about its organization, the interrelationships of different constituent consciousnesses, and its possible relationship to matter (James [1911] 1941, pp. 201–6). Still, "one fixed conclusion dogmatically emerges" for James, namely, that there exists "a continuum of cosmic consciousness into which our several minds plunge as into a

mother-sea or reservoir" (James [1911] 1941, p. 204). Similarly, in a letter to Henry Rankin, he again refers to this "mother sea": "We are thus made convincingly aware of the presence of a sphere of life larger and more powerful than our usual consciousness, with which the latter is nevertheless continuous. Religion in this way is absolutely indestructible" (Richardson 2006, p. 406). While James never denied that the future might ultimately prove him wrong regarding its noetic status (James 1920, p. 513), I conclude that James felt as certain of the existence of this wider ocean of consciousness as anyone could, short of having had a clairvoyant or indubitable mystical experience himself.

4. Overbeliefs Close to Experience

James also recognizes the need for interpretations beyond more or less immediate perceptions and intuitions, that is, the inevitability of "overbeliefs". Given his empirical bent, we would expect James to harness not only his own and others' experiences in support of the reality of wider consciousnesses, including that of the divine, but also philosophical analysis and theorizing that attempt to stay close to experience (I say "attempt", and in this article I will not pass any ultimate judgments on whether James succeeds in such attempts). Indeed, for the empiricist James, the very function or purpose of philosophy is to restore the fluency of immediate experience. Conceptual thought recognizes—and sometimes creates—problems in and among immediate experiences. Good philosophy strives to bring us back to the smooth flow of immediate experience (see, e.g., "The Sentiment of Rationality" (James 1956, pp. 63–110), a compilation of material originally from 1879–80; "The Thing and Its Relations" (James [1912] 2003, p. 48)). I discern four philosophical themes, interconnected in various ways, that helped James to recover the flow of experience—and to become twice-born: (1) his concept of "pure experience", (2) the alleged perceptual nature of religious and other supranormal experience, (3) the judgment that all we experience, both the natural and the "supernatural", falls within the same "realm" of existence, and (4) the judgment or assumption that experience entails an irreducible plurality—and temporality, yet at the same time a degree of unity that allows for manifold continuities, interconnections, and confluences—among them, the compounding of human and divine consciousnesses. All of these overbeliefs support the possibility or probability of religious experience.

In *Principles of Psychology* from 1890, James' analysis of the flux and flow of consciousness depicts an integration of what is in our field of consciousness, yet with indefinite or fuzzy boundaries (James 1890). Still, even in immediate sense experience, a distinction between subject and object obtains at this point in James' intellectual journey. Though he was quite open to our becoming aware of supranormal realities at the subliminal margins of our normal field of consciousness, this nevertheless meant an awareness of these realities only as external objects. Though our consciousness might be similar in kind to supranormal consciousnesses, James denied any possibility of overlapping, compounding, or enveloping of consciousness. However, with his program of "radical empiricism", James grows more radical on these issues. Significantly, he articulates a concept of "pure experience", a concept both psychological and metaphysical. While his earlier understanding of immediate sense experience involved some distinction between subject and object, pure experience occurs prior to any differentiation into subject and object, into mental and physical. This concept thus constitutes one of the ways, the most radical, whereby James attempts to overcome Cartesian dualism. When we retrospect on experience, we invariably differentiate between subject and object. As I interpret James, we normally make impure an instant of pure experience by mixing in concepts and categories, even if relatively pre-reflective or low-level ones (cf. Barnard 1997, p. 142; Ford 1982, pp. 78–85). As James puts it, "Only new-born babes, or men in semi-coma from sleep, drugs, illnesses, or blows, may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense of a *that* which is not yet any definite *what*, tho ready to be all sorts of whats" (James [1912] 2003, p. 49). (An irony pertains here: pure experience remains inaccessible to "experience" in the everyday sense of the word; it appears to be subliminal to our ordinary consciousness.) Metaphysically, pure experience serves as the "primal stuff" of all realities (James [1912] 2003, pp. 2–3), holding the potential

to be differentiated and contextualized into various subjective and objective, mental and physical, realities. I deliberately chose the word "realities", because pure experiences are particular and plural, despite a relative formlessness. In other words, Jamesian pure experience should in no way be confused with a monistic universal consciousness, absolutely formless, prior to all particularities.

What relation does James' late positing of pure experience have to his accrediting mystical and paranormal experiences? Obviously, the concept of pure experience entails a blurring—indeed in the initial moment an absence—of the distinction between subject and object. Moreover, James' interpretation of mystical and paranormal experience, while eschewing any ultimate pure consciousness that transcends all particularity, does involve the presence of another consciousness' contents within that of the experiencer. As Myers observes, in 1895 James already had abandoned his position from *Principles* of the discrete and indivisible nature of the contents of consciousness in each instantiation. In "The Knowing of Things Together", James heralded his conversion to the notion of the compounding of states of consciousness (Myers 1986, p. 333). That everything at the most primal level consists of pure experience has obvious enough implications that support the possibility of the compounding of consciousness, including compounding of our states with those of superhuman realities. At the level of pure experience, overlapping continually occurs in ordinary reality as we engage the world with other persons. While our practical need to survive and desire to thrive in the everyday world normally block any awareness of larger consciousnesses, in theory pure experience removes any insurmountable obstacle to our becoming aware of a wider consciousness.

Nevertheless, commentators Morris and Myers disagree on how explicitly James himself connected his concept of pure experience with his treatment of religious experience. For his part, Morris opines that James left the connection implicit: "As a datum, or ultimate fact, the mystical state of communion with God and participation in His life should, philosophically, have been assimilated to that 'pure experience' which James postulated as the primary stuff of being. But, leaving his metaphysics incomplete, he did not work out this problem" (Morris 1950, p. 67). Myers, on the other hand, states that James' belief in the divine as part of "the *more* that surrounds each experience was connected not only to the subconscious but also to the concept of pure experience as presented in *A Pluralistic Universe*" (Myers 1986, p. 473). Myers proceeds to explicate the subliminal "more" precisely in terms of pure experience (Myers 1986, pp. 473–74), even though the term "pure experience" itself does not appear in *Universe.* James does, however, expound upon immediate experience sans conceptualization, then continues: "And just as we are co-conscious with our own momentary margin, may not we ourselves form the margin of some more really central self in things which is co-conscious with the whole of us?" (James 1909, pp. 277–90). Moreover, James does here refer to his program as "radical empiricism", while the collection published as *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, published posthumously according to James' intentions, centers on the notion of pure experience (James [1912] 2003). Crucially, James delineates in *Universe* his conclusions regarding the entailments of one's position on the compounding of consciousnesses vis-à-vis one's concept of the nature of divinity: (1) rejection of compounding meant one must hold to a traditional theistic model wherein we are external to God and God is external to us; (2) acceptance of compounding allowed for a more pantheistic understanding wherein intimacy of human and divine consciousness is possible (James 1909, p. 193ff, 205ff). Thus, James' attraction to a more inclusive model for human–divine interrelationships constituted one motivation for his reconsideration of his position against compounding. Yet acceptance of compounding does not seem in itself to compel a doctrine of pure experience. (As suggested above, James' desire to overcome Cartesian dualism could provide motivation for developing his theory of pure experience.) Conversely, though, the concept of pure experience does make it easier to advance the notion of the compounding of different individual consciousnesses (as opposed to merely maintaining the compound nature of consciousness within each individual). That is, we do not have to worry about the messiness of dealing with any unalterable distinction between

consciousness and material objects as we try to put two or more consciousnesses together, since all reality at its most basic level consists of pure experience. Thus, I would claim that one motivation for James' formulation of his metaphysics of pure experience was precisely his desire to support the compounding of our consciousness with higher consciousnesses. Interestingly, in "Final Impressions of a Psychical Researcher", after portraying all minds as included in the mother sea of cosmic consciousness, he refers to his metaphysics as "some such 'panpsychic' view of the universe as this" (James [1911] 1941, p. 204).[1] Since neither that article nor *Universe* directly mentions "pure experience" in relation to mystical experience, one might pronounce Morris technically correct in saying James' left matters implicit and insufficiently developed. Yet, in his own way, James does strongly forge the linkage. Frankly, I do not fathom what "problem" Morris believes James failed to "work out" in that regard. While James, as mentioned above, confesses his ignorance respecting the particular levels of superhuman consciousnesses and their organization—a problem he hopes will one day find its resolution through empirical methods (James [1911] 1941, pp. 205–6), I see no theoretical problem as to how higher and lower levels of pure experience might compound. That is, if one grants the metaphysical theory of pure experience in the first place, James had no need to do further work to assimilate it to mystical experiences of the divine.

Holding to the perceptual nature of religious and other paranormal experiences represents another way that James offers philosophical support while attempting to stay close to experience. Especially for the benefit of those who have not had a full-blown mystical experience, James advocates for the plausibility of mystical perception through its similarity to, its continuity with, ordinary perception. The just-discussed concept of pure experience could complicate the analysis of ordinary perception and perhaps of supranormal perception. Yet it need not do so. The bottom line is this: for James, all individual experiences—in that they involve a perceptual element of particular content, with both a subjective and objective dimension—possess some difference, some distinction, from the experiences of every other individual, despite some overlapping or confluence. James' construal of mystical experience then does not permit the absolute loss or disappearance of the self in the divine, whereby one becomes identical with divinity beyond all particularity, beyond any and all senses of subjectivity and objectivity. He insists on an inalienable integrity and distinctiveness of the human person, even as it might compound with a divine consciousness. In such compounding, James does not allow that humans can ever know distinctly all the particularity that the inclusive divine consciousness perceives. Sometimes a particular perception, presumably included in some way in a superhuman and/or divine consciousness, may come through to a clairvoyant or a prophet. Nevertheless, for James, the religious mystical perception typically is of a "more" or "muchness" with fuzzy rather than clear and distinct contents.

Maintaining that the natural and "supernatural" comprise finally not two, but one, realm of experience permitted James to support the primacy of experience—and to do so in a way that upheld the plausibility of religious and paranormal experiences. Indeed, James concluded that the "foreigness" of an external, dualistic God or of an absolute monistic divine precluded commerce with either: with the former due to its atemporality, self-sufficiency (James 1909, pp. 24–30), and bodilessness (James 1909, p. 150); with the latter due to its own atemporality and impassible completeness (James 1909, pp. 39–40, 318–19) as well as to the lack of any autonomy or freedom for humans—and God—to affect future contingencies (as everything happens—or has eternally happened!—as it must in such a block-universe) (James 1909, pp. 310–11, 320–24). Moreover, any "universalistic" or "refined" supernaturalism where "God's existence" has "no consequence for particulars" fails to meet a "legitimate requirement" of religion (James 1902, pp. 520–23). As Perry notes, already in 1888, James had found attractive Edmund Gurney's "hypothetical supernaturalism", positing an "invisible order continuous with the present order of nature" (Perry 1935, vol. 2, p. 334). For James, the continuity of this type of supernaturalism, which he labels as "crass" or "piecemeal" in *Varieties* (James 1902, pp. 520–23), allows us to experience

God and allows the divine to have particular effects in the world, but in a manner not contradictory to the processes of nature discernible by science. Through the subliminal, James believed that renewing energies come (often with no conscious awareness of a superhuman or divine source), as do religious mystical experiences wherein renewing energies and confidence become conscious, as well as visionary-type experiences by clairvoyants and perhaps by religious geniuses.

Finally, James inducts, especially from more or less immediate experience, that experience and reality involve an irreducible plurality, diversity, and crucially temporality, while at the same time manifesting various unities—some given, some in the making. Of course, the compounding of human and superhuman consciousness counts as one of those unities or continuities for James. In *Universe* (James 1909, pp. 79, 256–57), and at more length in a late article published posthumously, "The One and the Many", James campaigns for pluralism over against his favorite opponent, monistic idealism. James handicaps monism for its absolutistic stance on oneness: "The irreducible outness of *any*thing, however infinitesimal, from *any*thing else, in *any* respect, would be enough, if it were solidly established, to ruin the monistic doctrine" (James 1911, p. 115). Empiricism, "taking perceptual experience at its face-value" (James 1911, p. 140), provides for the solid establishment of some diversity and disconnection. By contrast, rationalistic monism only comes to its doctrine through abstract conceptualization cut off from experience. Empirical observation establishes the reality of both diversity and unity, both manyness and oneness, the precise nature of the mix established by retail rather than wholesale methods:

> To sum up, the world is "one" in some respects, and "many" in others. But the respects must be distinctly specified, if either statement is to be more than the emptiest abstraction. The amount of either unity or of plurality is, in short, only a matter for observation to ascertain and write down, in statements which will have to be complicated, in spite of every effort to be concise (James 1911, pp. 133–34; see also 1909, p. 79).

5. Conclusions

Clearly pluralism as James construes it involves various and sundry connections and unities. As preceding sections of this article have suggested, James grew to endorse an "intimate", "indwelling", even "pantheistic" understanding of the divine, wherein human life is "part and parcel of that deep reality" (James 1909, pp. 28–30). Such a model cohered well with the unitive tendencies accompanying James' interest and "will to believe" in religious experiences, in contrast to a more traditional model wherein God stood as simply discontinuous with the world. Of course, as above, James insists that God cannot "be the absolutely totalized all-enveloper", lest the autonomy, distinctness, and particularities of individuals slip into the black hole of the block universe and God be "responsible for everything, including evil" (James 1909, pp. 294–95). Yet James proves willing to go quite far in his enthusiasm for divine inclusiveness. Fechner's theory of successively enveloping consciousnesses, including an earth soul or consciousness, fascinates James, who finds it plausible (James 1909, pp. 131–77). As in "Final Impressions of a Psychical Researcher", James will not commit to a specific configuration of superhuman consciousness(es) (James 1909, pp. 310–11). However, as inclusive of human and perhaps intermediary superhuman consciousnesses, the span of the divine consciousness is "vast" (James 1909, pp. 310–11). While James will not follow Fechner on divine all-inclusiveness—and he contends that Fechner himself demurs from making God the absolute "all-enveloper" on several counts (James 1909, pp. 294–95), he does write the following in *Radical Empiricism*: "If there be a God, he is no absolute all-experiencer, but simply the experiencer of widest actual conscious span" (James [1912] 2003, p. 102). In *Universe*, James affirms, "We are indeed internal parts of God and not external creations, on any possible reading of the panpsychic system"[2] (James 1909, pp. 318–19).

James' last piece published during his lifetime, "A Pluralistic Mystic", referring to Benjamin Paul Blood, further evidences his valorization of both pluralism and mystical

experience with its unitive tendencies. Perry recounts that James took this opportunity to trumpet his "philosophical indebtedness" to Blood, who spurred James' own mystical experimentation, as we have seen earlier. Sensing the possible imminence of his own death before Blood might produce a synthesis of Blood's own scattershot philosophical work, James took it upon himself to attempt the task (Perry 1935, vol. 2, pp. 658–60). James felt this indebtedness both for Blood's philosophical ruminations, which ended up being similar to James' emerging metaphysics—at least as interpreted by James—and for Blood's corroboration of this metaphysics via his mystical experiences (James [1911] 1941, pp. 374–75). James quotes Blood that "Nature is contingent, excessive, and mystical essentially" (James [1911] 1941, p. 394). Invoking the theme of manyness in oneness, James interprets Blood to mean that "there is no more one all-enveloping fact than there is one all-enveloping spire in an endlessly growing spiral, and no more one all-generating fact than there is one central point in which an endlessly converging spiral ends" (James [1911] 1941, p. 404). Once again paying homage to temporality, James affirms this sentiment and these words from Blood: "There can be no purpose of eternity. It is process all. The most sublime result, if it appeared as the ultimatum, would go stale in an hour; it could not be endured" (James [1911] 1941, p. 406). James then concludes his own philosophizing with additional words from Blood; the temporal process will continue whether or not James' subjectivity continues after his death: "There is no conclusion. What has concluded, that we might conclude in regard to it? There are no fortunes to be told, and there is no advice to be given.—Farewell!" (James [1911] 1941, p. 411).

Blood thus lent James significant help in attempting to hold together both the realism of empiricism and the tenderness of mysticism, and both his pluralistic and his unitive leanings. Assuming the correctness of my characterization of James as a "sick soul" and a "divided self", his attempt at such a synthesis should not surprise us. It was part and parcel of his attempt to find a second birth. At bottom, the sick soul, unlike the once-born, senses the depth of evil. And twice-born religion emerges from a salvific assurance of the worthwhileness of life in the face of such evil through a link to the divine. Many in his age found their second birth in monistic idealism. However, while the more expresses itself in nature, for James this never constitutes a "perfect expression". Neither immediate experience nor philosophical analysis can justify the mental gymnastics entailed in monistic faith that all rests in perfect harmony within the One, despite appearances, and that the Absolute appears to will particular evils. Nature is an expression of diversity-in-unity, but again never a perfect expression. Perfect harmony of each to each and within a larger whole is an ideal to strive for, not an actuality in present experience.

William James, then, advanced from a faith in moral effort alone to a twice-born faith bearing an assurance of some saving relationship vis-à-vis the divine. He had already achieved this in some form and to some degree, circa 1880 (see, for example, James 1956, pp. 95–110, 111–44 [the latter article entitled, "Reflex Action and Theism"]): he had a commitment to the existence of a good God and to a universe good on the whole, so that his basic attitude could be one of trust. At that point, however, God was rather external, too separated to fully satisfy James. After struggling for many years, particularly with the issue of the possibility of the compounding of consciousness, by 1895 he had committed himself to the notion of a more intimate divine who coinhered with us in important respects at the margins of our normal consciousness. In addition, he attempted to experience the nature of unitive states with his experimentation with consciousness-altering drugs in the early 1880's. Finally, his own mystical-like experience of nature and then his late valorization of four reminiscences or dream experiences of "sudden uncovering", along with his accreditation of more definitive mystical experiences of others, not the least that of Blood, brought James to a very strong twice-born faith carrying an assurance of the meaningfulness of his life. He ventured far beyond any once-born faith that failed to wrestle mightily with the metaphysical question of evil—and with the practical question of coping with formidable evil.

A positive aspect of James' treatment of mystical and other religious experiences, in my view, is that the body is always involved, whether consciously or subliminally. This contrasts with those claiming that mystical experiences and "out-of-body" experiences provide support for dualistic beliefs that the mind leaves behind any bodily awareness or feelings in these experiences (Shushan 2014, pp. 406–7; Winkelman 2018, p. 7).

Scientific knowledge today versus that available to James makes it more difficult to find evidence of direct divine causation or input in religious experiences. We now know that a pre-reflective distinction between self and other exists in early infancy (Gallagher and Meltzoff 1996). While perception is an action in relation to one's environment that specifies some indeterminacies, there is no undifferentiated reality or moment prior to the self recognizing, pre-reflectively, that it is engaging its world. Thus, the theory of pure experience fails, as does the support it might offer for a compounding of human and divine consciousnesses. Regarding subliminal perceptions: while knowledge exists about subconscious or tacit perceptions of information from one's environment, no scientific evidence points to a divine referent for these perceptions in the natural environment (or for that matter, wholly transcending nature). Thus, one might find the value of religious experiences in terms of one of James' criteria for truth—a pragmatic criterion: their beneficial or adaptive effects rather than more objective criteria.

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Notes

[1] In relating James' rejection of C. A. Strong's version of panpsychism, Myers asserts that James never "espous(ed)" pansychism "fully and decisively" As Myers adds, James refuses to simply identify reality as essentially "psychic" or "mental" (Myers 1986, p. 333). Such identification would discount the material, the bodily, and the objective. (James' "panpsychism" then would consist of the claim that all reality has a psychic dimension, not that every aspect of everything is psychic.) Remember James' attempts to overcome Cartesian dualism by positing pure experience as prior to differentiation into mental and physical. Nonetheless, one can make the case that the supposedly neutral primal stuff favors the mental side in the very adoption of the word "experience" to describe it. Interestingly Alfred North Whitehead praises James for inaugurating an era of post-Cartesian dualism (Whitehead 1925, pp. 143–47; cf. Morris 1950, p. 53). Whitehead for his part wants to avoid such dualism. Yet in stipulating "unit occasions of experience" as the basic metaphysical reality, he too might fall prey to the accusation of favoring the mental over the physical. Indeed, at least for James, every experience purportedly differentiates into something physical and objective. With Whitehead, however, the "physical pole" of each unit occasion consists of past occasions of experience; thus, we seem to have more unambiguously a mental or idealistic monism relative to the basic unit of reality.

[2] James then adds, "Yet because God is not the absolute, but is himself a part when the system is conceived pluralistically, his functions can be taken as not wholly dissimilar to those of the other smaller parts" (James 1909, pp. 318–19). A sense exists then in which God is "united" with us in having temporal purposes to fulfill and obstacles to overcome, precisely because the divine is not the absolute unity postulated by idealistic monism, which James regards as foreign in its eternal, impassible completeness.

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