

2012-03-19

# Religion and Disillusion in William James, George Santayana, and Henry James

Antonio I. Rionda

*University of Miami*, [airgem66@yahoo.com](mailto:airgem66@yahoo.com)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa\\_dissertations](https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations)

---

## Recommended Citation

Rionda, Antonio I., "Religion and Disillusion in William James, George Santayana, and Henry James" (2012). *Open Access Dissertations*. 779.

[https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa\\_dissertations/779](https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations/779)

This Open access is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact [repository.library@miami.edu](mailto:repository.library@miami.edu).

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

RELIGION AND DISILLUSION IN WILLIAM JAMES, GEORGE SANTAYANA,  
AND HENRY JAMES

By

Antonio Ivan Rionda

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty  
of the University of Miami  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2012

©2012  
Antonio I. Rionda  
All Rights Reserved

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

RELIGION AND DISILLUSION IN WILLIAM JAMES, GEORGE SANTAYANA,  
AND HENRY JAMES

Antonio Ivan Rionda

Approved:

\_\_\_\_\_  
John Paul Russo, Ph.D.  
Professor of English and Classics

\_\_\_\_\_  
Terri A. Scandura, Ph.D.  
Dean of the Graduate School

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert Casillo, Ph.D.  
Professor of English

\_\_\_\_\_  
Frank Stringfellow, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of English

\_\_\_\_\_  
John T. Kirby, Ph.D.  
Professor of Classics

RIONDA, ANTONIO IVAN  
Religion and Disillusion in William James, George  
Santayana, and Henry James

(Ph.D., English)

(May 2012)

Abstract of a dissertation at the University of Miami.

Dissertation supervised by Professor John Paul Russo.  
No. of pages in text. (180)

My dissertation will examine George Santayana's view of religion and apply it to Henry James and William James. Living in an age of transition that was keenly aware of the differences between how the United States and Europe related to their common religious inheritance, each man developed different, yet related, approaches to understanding the role religion might play in a new emerging social reality.

Although Santayana hardly used the term 'type,' the concept pervades his thinking. In *Realms of Being* the word *realm* is close to *type* in meaning, as is *order* in *Dominations and Powers*. In *Three Philosophical Poets*, Santayana argues that Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe each represent an ideal high point in Western culture and concludes that a poetic vision that combines all three is needed, since none of them is expendable in developing a complete view of the nature of existence.

The Dante-type is the most straightforward, concerned as Dante was with the moral dimension of existence. The Lucretius-type may be roughly characterized as a materialist and a naturalist, and the Goethe-type as a kind of romantic pagan. Santayana, who identified strongly with Dante, considered William James an imperfect naturalist and a romantic. Consequently, my dissertation will attempt to determine the nature of James's

naturalism and how he relates to the other types. He is the opposite of Santayana in as much as he attempts to examine religious experience denuded of the vestments of tradition and belief. Henry James's position is subtle and difficult to characterize, especially since it is mostly found in his fiction, which is most often devoted to an exploration of the ambiguities of consciousness. His characters often seem to be, as Santayana argues of Goethe's Faust, caught up in the immediacy of experience. His goal, however, may be to overcome this perspective and point the way to a moral, Dante-type approach to religion.

Santayana is the central figure in this dissertation, for having the most ambitious, comprehensive vision, one that will be tested, criticized, or amended, as necessitated by the results of my investigation.

I dedicate this doctoral dissertation to my daughter Jackie Athena Rionda for her love, enthusiasm, and encouragement.

## Acknowledgements

This work would be greatly inferior to its current form if not for the support and dedication of the dissertation committee. John Paul Russo helped me to identify and appreciate the Classical aspects of Santayana's thinking, and to see how these were relevant to my initial thesis and to the work of Henry James. He also demonstrated great interest in the work, providing invaluable assistance at every level of the dissertation process. Robert Casillo was an invaluable guide for elucidating crucial differences between various religious traditions, while Frank Stringfellow raised important issues that served to clarify the nature of the work, both in its fine details and as a whole. John T. Kirby made important observations concerning the inner workings of academic disciplines.

I am personally indebted to my mother Santa, my father Antonio, as well as Bonnie Rionda, for their support through the years. Finally, I thank Connie McGehee for her cheerfulness during a difficult time.

## Preface

William James's breakthrough ideas in psychology, philosophy, and religion had a strong impact on George Santayana and Henry James, and both felt compelled to deal with his ideas in their writings. This influence is particularly striking when one considers just how they mutually differed in personal character from William James – the latter masculine, active, and greatly preoccupied with methodological issues, Santayana and Henry James similarly passive and equally focused on imaginative and creative pursuits. Unfortunately, William James's intellectual legacy suffers from a uniquely American impasse, as William James follows his father, Henry James Sr. in highlighting the sick soul or morbid-minded type of religious experience that places despair at its core. This creates a bias in favor of Protestantism, and inexorably leads William James to become ensnared in well-known tensions associated with the Puritan ethos. Only Santayana was in a position to avoid incorporating these tensions as essential moments in his thinking because of his Catholic background and his extensive reading in the early history of philosophy and religion.

One year younger than his brother, Henry James also had to deal with his father's sick soul perspective and the uniquely religious upbringing that set them apart from other more mainstream Protestant families. The difference between them is that Henry James explored divergent religious attitudes within the imaginative, aesthetic framework of the literary artist that is inherently more liberated, although he still remains unable to overcome the difficulties associated with the divided soul that William James so eloquently depicts in his writings.

In William James's *Principles of Psychology*, Santayana finds many ideas that inspire him to think further about the reality that they invoke. But, after Henry James Sr.'s death in the early 1880s, William James becomes a more vehement exponent of Calvinist ideals, indirectly contributing to the most heated epistolary exchanges between James and Santayana. In *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James embeds the perspective of the sick soul within a "science of religions" in an attempt to show how the tortured, divided soul associated with Calvinist inspired ideals represents a superior form of religious experience from earlier pagan and Catholic traditions.

Santayana objected to James's religious bias from its subtle expression in the earlier work, but experienced its intensification in the later one as indicating a change in William James's approach to investigation, now one that endeavors to narrow possibilities rather than expand them. For his part, James felt that the publication of Santayana's *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* clearly exposed him for a closet Catholic, which James found objectionable. Hence, during the late 1880s and the ensuing decade their relationship reaches a final stasis – James would continue to support Santayana's professional aspirations, but keep a safe distance from his ideas. This rift has been perpetuated by later interpreters sometimes with little or no analysis to support the view that no significant continuity exists between their respective ideas.

Several years after James's death, Santayana was able to retire early from Harvard and eventually, after living in various places in Europe, settled in Rome in the 1920s. Free to pursue his writing exclusively, Santayana continued to publish essays, the best-selling novel *The Last Puritan*, and a second multi-volume work on philosophy. During his later phase, Santayana pursues a philosophical perspective that supplants his earlier

criticisms against the Puritan ethos with concrete analyses and alternatives to the sick soul that emphasize a spiritual life that remains closer to later phenomenological philosophy than to pragmatism, although all such labels fail to encompass the richness of perspectives included in Santayana's philosophy.

The differences between William James and Santayana, both personal and intellectual, find expression in philosophical positions that have not been sufficiently analyzed by later interpreters, who rarely move beyond pragmatism in examining their respective philosophies. William James increasingly embraced, among many others, an existentialist philosophy that resembles that of Kierkegaard, and this perspective increasingly alienated the rational Santayana. While both James and Santayana rejected any philosophy that resembled Positivism, the later, more religious minded James placed an emphasis on suffering and despair that Santayana found incommensurable with his experience. Hence, as the thought of each continued to develop from its earliest common starting point in James's phenomenology, each moved in an opposite direction.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION: HEALTHY-MINDEDNESS AND MORBID-MINDEDNESS IN WILLIAM JAMES, GEORGE SANTAYANA AND HENRY JAMES.....	1
I. Religious Experience in William James and Santayana.....	1
II. William James’s Primary Typology and Henry James’s Uses of It.....	9
III. Santayana’s Significance for James’s Typology .....	15
IV. Morality and the Puritan Ethos.....	20
2 PRAGMATISM IN WILLIAM JAMES AND SANTAYANA.....	29
I. James’s Complex Philosophical Legacy .....	29
II. Santayana and Pragmatism.....	41
III. Santayana’s Tethered Bird Analogy .....	49
IV. Historical and Rational Reconstructions of Philosophy .....	55
3 PHENOMENOLOGY AND EXISTENTIALISM IN WILLIAM JAMES AND SANTAYANA.....	62
1. William James and Santayana: An Ambivalent Relationship .....	62
II. Pagan and Puritan Traditions in the Santayana / James Correspondence ...	70
III. Santayana’s Final Retrospective on James .....	84
IV. Disagreements over Phenomenology and Existentialism.....	87
V. Husserl’s Concept of the Philosophical Habitus.....	104
4 THE DIVIDED SOUL OF HENRY JAMES .....	116
I. Henry James’s Allusive Style .....	116
II. The Influence of the Father .....	128
III. Purity and Desire in <i>The Bostonians</i> .....	132
IV. <i>The Wings of a Dove</i> and <i>The Golden Bowl</i> .....	152
EPILOGUE.....	164
WORKS CITED .....	175

## Chapter 1: Introduction: Healthy-Mindedness and Morbid-Mindedness in William James, George Santayana and Henry James

### I. Religious Experience in William James and Santayana<sup>1</sup>

Although twenty-one years his senior, William James did his major work on religion during the same period as George Santayana was beginning his work on it. James's earlier work in psychology had greatly influenced Santayana, particularly in its open-ended approach to dealing with philosophical issues (McCormick 87).<sup>2</sup> On religious questions, however, Santayana and James diverged greatly, as each was rooted in a different tradition. These circumstances set up a unique and complex dynamic in their work because while their methods and style are similar their overall results and general tone seem to conflict.

A clear example emerges from a brief comparison of how they handle their material. In *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, first published in book form in 1900 Santayana includes a chapter entitled "The Homeric Hymns," which prefigures the style of using extensively long quotations that later became a hallmark of James's approach in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, published two years later in 1902. Santayana rarely includes such a large amount of quoted material in his prose, and this anomaly should be viewed as emblematic of his intense passion for the classical. This represents, however, the kind of text that James will not find worthy of extensive citation in his work that limits itself exclusively to reports of direct experiences.

---

<sup>1</sup> The following four pages are taken from an upcoming article, "Paganism in William James and George Santayana" in *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society*.

<sup>2</sup> James's philosophy as a whole had a great impact on Santayana's thinking. *The Principles of Psychology* was published in 1890, a time when our contemporary academic demarcations that would later separate psychology from philosophy were not yet in place. Hence, Gale finds all of James's philosophy already prefigured in this seminal work (347).

James's framework for examining religious ideas is narrower than the one proposed by Santayana. In an earlier work, James counts as a "*Hypothesis . . . anything that may be proposed to our belief.*" Borrowing an analogy from how electricians describe wires, we could also "speak of any hypothesis as either *live* or *dead*. A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed" (Will 717). In *Varieties*, James implicitly follows this line of argument, describing the pagan religious experience as an irrelevant set of dead hypotheses no longer capable of eliciting any genuine response to real, human concerns.<sup>3</sup> Like James, Santayana also gives primacy to experience: "Whatever forces may govern human life, if they are to be recognized by man, must betray themselves in human experience" (Life 1:1). Santayana, however, strives to expand the realm of living religious options by shifting the discussion to the consideration of practicable ideals rather than hypotheses as objects of belief.

Knowing each other well, both personally and professionally, Santayana and James each took the ideas of the other for granted in their respective religious frameworks, and each alludes to the work of the other in indirect and implicit ways. This common context shared by Santayana and James has become eclipsed throughout the twentieth century and has only recently begun to be recovered. Bruce Kuklick's reference, for example, to "the Golden Age of American philosophy" as "the thirty years that Royce and James spent together, from the 1880s to the First World War" (xx) is at odds with Bertrand Russell's report of his annoyance while visiting Cambridge as a lecturer in 1914, at which time he was repeatedly reminded of how Harvard had recently

---

<sup>3</sup> These definitions were set forth in *Will to Believe* (717). In *Varieties*, he does not explicitly use this terminology, but the methodology he develops has the effect of reducing pagan ideas, not only in content, as he ignores much, but to dead hypothesis that deserve little attention.

lost James, Santayana, and Royce as active members. The Golden Age of American philosophy includes Santayana as an essential member.<sup>4</sup>

Each of these three thinkers approaches the study of religions from a different perspective. In *Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life*, Henry Samuel Levinson traces some of the salient differences between each along with their posthumous influence. Royce pursues “an objectivist path that most American philosophers of religion eventually will take during this [twentieth] century” (89). His idealist philosophy represents an attempt to bolster the reality of the Absolute, which can only be ascertained through the study of philosophy, i.e., metaphysics and epistemology. This God-like entity serves to guarantee truth and correct purposefulness in human actions: “Royce claims that the key to true significance and well-being is the establishment of the objective relations that obtain between individuals and Absolute Spirit” (89). In however many ways it may vary, this objectivist path remains dominant in religious studies in America.

James’s emphasis on experience rather than ideas represents an attempt to establish a new science of religions in order to avoid the limitations of speculative, philosophical argumentation. Science generates living hypotheses for modern thinkers and making religious experience the object of scientific investigation would serve to

---

<sup>4</sup> Russell was repeatedly told: “Our philosophical faculty, Dr. Russell, as doubtless you are aware, has lately suffered three great losses. We have lost our esteemed colleague, Professor William James, through his lamented death; Professor Santayana, for reasons which doubtless appear to him to be sufficient, has taken up his residence in Europe; last, *but* not least, Professor Royce, who, I am happy to say, is still with us, has had a stroke.” John McCormick reports that “This speech was delivered slowly, seriously, and pompously.” Russell would unsuccessfully attempt to derail this speech by interrupting it with his own speeded-up version (213).

validate religions for nonbelievers, who would then be forced to contend with this realm of experience, even if skeptical about the existence of its putative referents, such as God or miracles. Hence, James examines different reports of religious conversions and their distinctive impact on people's lives, while leaving open the possibility that something more – something beyond a psychological (non-Freudian) unconscious, obviously at work in such cases – may indeed be at work in originating such experiences. This tradition continues to generate innovative scholarship.<sup>5</sup> Lynn Bridges, for example, provides an excellent introduction to James's analysis of religions. According to Ann Taves, however, she also provides her own unique perspective on "James's typology by introducing the reader to research and writings that have taken his categories and demonstrated their power with empirical investigation" (Introduction viii).<sup>6</sup>

Santayana differs from both James and Royce in that for him "religion is good poetry if it is good for anything," a perspective that Santayana contends also benefits the goals as well as the standing of religions in the world (Levinson 87). Levinson finds this view to have been most influential in cultural anthropology. He notes that in 1947 Ruth Benedict mentioned several of Santayana's works as important for the field. He also points out that Clifford Geertz exhibits Santayana's influence in "his essays on common sense, ideology, religion, and art (and, I'd wager, eventually science) as 'cultural

---

<sup>5</sup> Proudfoot traces the origins and shortcomings of the idea of religious experience (Religious) and Taves reviews some of the controversies it has generated in *Religious Experience Reconsidered* (3-9), which leads her to propose some innovations to the use of the concept.

<sup>6</sup> The extent of James's influence in all fields that he worked in is impossible to overestimate. Gale characterizes James as a "great appreciator." His "philosophical writings are very rich and suggestive, so much so that every major subsequent movement in philosophy can find its roots in them" (20). Bruner emphasizes that "his influence was more atmospheric than substantive, more ideological than theoretical" (73). He also credits this atmospheric influence with helping to launch the cognitive revolution and helping to initiate the "constructivist point of view" (74).

systems' reflect the influence of *The Life of Reason*" (297). Santayana also influenced the poet Wallace Stevens.<sup>7</sup>

Herman Saatkamp Jr. observes that although Santayana has not received the attention he merits, "his perspectives were far ahead of their time, and they deserve reconsideration and respect." In his list of intellectual achievements, he includes Santayana's early support of naturalism, his intelligent restatement of Platonic and Aristotelian ideas and his appreciation of "multiple perfections before multiculturalism became an issue." Santayana's most distinctive accomplishment was creating "a striking and sensitive account of the spiritual life without being a religious believer" (xxxii).<sup>8</sup> Saatkamp's evaluation gains currency in light of Santayana's interpretation of the pagan religious experience, as contrasted to James's subordination of it to later Christian accounts of their experiences.

Conjointly, Santayana and James's work remains important because it represents an experience-based alternative to Royce's transcendental, idealist philosophy of religion. The young Santayana studied philosophy at Harvard and continued through the ranks to becoming a professor and influential author who became a leading voice of the institution until his early departure in 1912 (Kuklick 352, 365). As regularly happens in intellectual history, however, theirs was an often strained relationship. In *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism*, Robert D. Richardson best captures how the differences between them functioned in their respective writings. They neither disliked

---

<sup>7</sup> For an account of tributes to Santayana from several poets see McCormick, 504-08.

<sup>8</sup> From Herman J. Saatkamp Jr.'s introduction to a recent reissue of Santayana's *The Birth of Reason and Other Essays*, a collection first published posthumously by Santayana's assistant Daniel Cory.

nor misunderstood each other, as it is so often suggested, but rather “By being so different, they were perfect foils for each other. Underlying good will counted for something. Each made room for the other in his intellectual universe, both wrote better prose than anyone in the Harvard English department of the time, and Santayana wrote some of the best and most generous descriptions we have of William James” (285). Richardson underestimates the complexity and ambivalence of their relationship. In retrospect, however, it has become obvious that their similarities do outweigh their differences in some important respects.

In “George Santayana’s Theory of Religion,” Joseph Ratner highlights the common starting point of religious experience for each: “Religion . . . is really, as James would say, ‘a man’s (or nation’s) reaction upon life,’ whatever this reaction may be, so that ‘any total reaction upon life is a religion’” (461). Ratner compares James’s characterization to Santayana’s “‘any reasoned appreciation of life is . . . a religion even if (there are in it) no conventionally religious elements,’” extolling the superiority of the latter because “the phrase ‘reasoned appreciation,’ makes explicit what is at best only vaguely suggested by James’s phrase, ‘total reaction’” (461). Santayana’s characterization helps him to avoid this essential ambiguity that leaves James vulnerable to Deweyian appropriations that James would not have wanted to countenance.<sup>9</sup>

Kurt F. Reinhardt provides a brief synopsis of several possible religious experiences in terms of the differing traditions that foster them in his introduction to *The Theological Novel of Modern Europe*. “Every state of mind,” he notes, “expresses or

---

<sup>9</sup> See Rorty for some difficulties in James’s account of the total reaction as constituting the religious.

reflects a specific relation to reality as a whole” (1). It becomes legitimate then to pose the question: “What mental disposition is prevalent in the person who is in search of truth?” (2). The answer of Ancient Greek philosophy “is the ability to listen, and on the part of the listener, a certain leisure (*otium*), trust, serenity, love.” To this one may add empathy and sympathy in order to react to the passions expressed by a particular author, “call it a spiritual manner of communication which in turn may lead to a deeper understanding of life and a better way of communication among human beings” (2).

This classical perspective perfectly describes Santayana, whose differences from James align along Catholic lines: “The person, for example, who sets his belief in a wrathful, arbitrary, and terrifying Deity is intimidated, downhearted, frightened or despairing. The one who places his trust in a benignant and loving God, on the other hand, becomes either joyful and serene, or he may comfortably lapse into complacency” (4). That character relates to the tradition one chooses or belongs to, Reinhardt readily admits as plausible, but of no great consequence, for either way the two, the human being and the tradition, remain intertwined, even if “genuine revelation” putatively transcends such differences (6). These differences remain relevant for understanding Santayana and James, for as Reinhardt also notes, “One may even speak of a typical Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish form of atheism. Auguste Comte and Voltaire were and remained typical Roman Catholics without a Catholic faith” (5).

Ratner provides an extraordinarily apt metaphor to describe Santayana’s approach to different religious traditions: “Immortality, or the conservation of value, as the fundamental religious conception, is merely the denominator of religious thought, and as such colorless.” For Santayana, “the numerators, the particular ideas and aspirations of

an age or people that are endowed with immortality, are the significant distinguishing things” (261). One of these specific distinctions, as described by Reinhardt explains a significant way in which Santayana differs from James: “However, no Roman Catholic would ever assert with Luther or Kierkegaard that despair is an almost necessary condition of faith. At most he might say . . . that Christian hope has its starting point in that situation of ‘threat’ and ‘danger’ in which man finds himself constitutionally and radically placed” (26). Santayana will affirm precisely the latter less imperious conception, allowing for despair as a possible moment of life, just not the defining one for genuine religious experience.<sup>10</sup>

Concerning experience and reality, Reinhardt concludes that all of the major human emotions are relevant for experiencing reality to its fullest, for “Life and reality as such comprise sadness and joy, faith and skeptical doubt, hatred and love, anguish and trust, despair and hope, restlessness and peace of mind” (3). If we place despair at one end of a spectrum and reason at the other, then between James and Santayana we have a full catalogue of varieties of religious experiences colored by a host of differing emotions. Santayana’s reach here is much greater than James’s for not having to remain bound to the single emotion of despair. Santayana’s repertoire exhibited by the great variety of genres he explores, includes humor and irony, curiously absent from Reinhardt’s list. In the end, Reinhardt seems to yearn for a Catholicism that can accommodate Kierkegaardian despair. In this, he exhibits his real theological colors, for theology always aims to reduce variety, rather than relish it. Experience based

---

<sup>10</sup> The position represents a major argument running through *The Life of Reason* (3:18).

approaches, in contrast, accept the given and available as starting point, and for Santayana religious experience includes the irreverent, comic, and festive, as antidote to despair.<sup>11</sup>

## II. William James's Primary Typology and Henry James's Uses of It

*Varieties* is a seminal work on religions. Both the original lectures and the consequent book, which includes a short but significant postscript added at the end, greatly contributed to James's success with the public: "The Gifford Lectures attracted larger audiences on each subsequent occasion and earned James worldwide acclaim. Their publication under the title *The Varieties of Religious Experience* attracted new readers to James's work" (Mcquade xli). The central argument of the book has sometimes been obscured by commentators: "James's more significant evaluative thesis is set forth in a quiet polemic that is easy to miss because it takes the form of a simple descriptive typology, distinguishing religious optimism from religious pessimism. The terms he uses for these is 'healthy-mindedness' and 'the sick soul.'" James's dichotomies were never meant to be neutral, but to tip the scales in one direction or another; consequently, "He judges the optimistic type to be superficial and naïve in light of the extent of suffering and evil in the world" (Proudfoot 42).

That James did prefer one type to the other remains uncontroversial, but the all too common interpretation that his was a straightforward typology of pessimists and optimists is difficult to sustain in the light of his exposition as a whole, for he

---

<sup>11</sup> Levinson explores these aspects of Santayana's work in the chapters "Festive Criticism" and "Comic Faith" of *Santayana: Pragmatism and the Spiritual Life*

complicates his initial characterization of healthy-mindedness and sick soul (morbid-mindedness) with a separate set of terms he adopts from Cardinal Newman's younger brother, once-born and twice-born and includes a whole catalogue of nuanced observations that create further complications for the popular typology. These considerations create the need for a more precise terminology than the typical, conflated typology of optimistic, once-born, healthy-minded and its opposite, the pessimistic, twice-born, sick soul (morbid-mindedness). To avoid confusion, I reserve the term "primary types" or "primary typology" for when I want to refer to the healthy-minded and sick soul (or morbid-minded) distinction, as functioning independently from the once-born and twice-born dimension, and "Newman's typology" or "Newman's types" when I want to isolate the latter from the primary.

Central to James's methodology is what he refers to as the "serial study": "Phenomena are best understood when placed within their series, studied in their germ and in their over-ripe decay, and compared with their exaggerated and degenerated kindred." James placed the greatest emphasis on this method, which he characterizes as "so essential for interpretation that if we really wish to reach conclusions we must use it." Consequently, his investigations always logically commence "with phenomena which claim no special religious significance, and end with those of which the religious pretensions are extreme" (330).

The phrase "serial study" conveys a sense of neutrality, but for James, to move from the first to the last in the series represents a progression from the least to the most important expression of the type. "The extreme" is, consequently, the most significant, most representative of the series. Hence, the most extreme of the healthy-minded is of

central importance for understanding the type as a whole, and its opposite, the morbid-minded, is the more extreme of the two and the most genuinely religious; hence, the one to which he devotes the greatest portion of his lectures.

After pointing out that “the Latin races have leaned more towards” the healthy-minded and that such comparisons between different peoples are never absolute, he adds that “undoubtedly the northern tone in religion has inclined to the more intimately pessimistic persuasion, and this way of feeling being the more extreme, we shall find by far the more instructive for our study” (125). Following this logic, the most extreme version of the healthy-minded religion pales in quality of religiosity to that of the morbid-minded or sick soul: “Just as we saw that in healthy-mindedness there are shallower and profounder levels, happiness like that of the mere animal, and more regenerate sorts of happiness, so also are there different levels of the morbid mind, and the one is much more formidable than the other” (124).

Each one of the primary types constitutes in essence a radically different religion, both in terms of individuals’ development, and of the system of ideas and related institutions that foster these respective tendencies. Hence, Catholic confession represents “little more than a systematic method of keeping healthy-mindedness on top” (Varieties 120), and “the Latin races have leaned more toward” healthy-mindedness than the “Germanic races” (Varieties 125), although James will later wonder why such an efficacious practice was so easily given up by later Protestants (398).

In the view of many, if James introduces a second set of terms taken from Cardinal Newman’s younger brother (Varieties 80), it is only to emphasize the superiority of the sick soul, which consists in its undiluted acknowledgement of the

existence of evil. The twice-born “look back on themselves” and become “distressed by their own imperfections” (80).<sup>12</sup> In *The Phenomenology of Henry James*, Paul Armstrong, for example, assuming the methodology of existential-phenomenology, suggests that the primary typology combines with Newman’s types to establish a unique dialectic: “These two dyads actually combine to make up a single triad that consists of a thesis (possibility), and antithesis (limitation), and a synthesis (the servile will)” (102). Within this scheme, the sick soul represents a transitional phase of despair that is *aufgehoben* when one achieves the status of the twice-born, who realize that neither shallow healthy-mindedness nor the sufferings of the sick soul by themselves can provide an adequate perspective for a genuine religious outlook. Hence, the most genuine form of religious experience is of the sick soul twice-born variety to which William James significantly devotes over half of the work.

Armstrong believes that Henry James also adheres to this paradigm that privileges morbid despair over healthy-minded optimism, and develops his perspective through an analysis of *The Portrait of a Lady*. At the start of the novel, “Isabel Archer is the very image of once-born healthy-mindedness” (104). The story unfolds in ways that allow her to transcend her condition, however, and achieve a morally higher, twice-born, sick soul perspective. Hence, hers becomes, in the end, “the very image” of spiritual development. Leaving aside the technical details of Armstrong’s argument, it seems unwarranted to take *Portrait* as representative of James’s view of his brother’s typology, since he addresses the typology in so many other works.

---

<sup>12</sup> Newman’s words, as cited by James, refer negatively to the once-born: “they do not look back into themselves. Hence, they are not distressed by their own imperfections.”

In *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, for example, Pericles Lewis finds James's typology at work in James's last two novels. Lewis argues that James's characters must generally accept that we can have "no direct encounter with the supernatural" and must come to terms with "the world in its fallen state." "The difference between Milly Theale, in *The Wings of the Dove*, and Maggie Verver, in *The Golden Bowl*, lies in their respective responses to this discovery. Milly is essentially a sick soul, whereas Maggie is strikingly healthy-minded; and this accounts in large part for the very different endings of the two novels" (55).

The history of James's development of his typology has been notoriously mischaracterized by many. James first use of it is to be found in his introduction to *The Literary Remains of Henry James* published in 1885. This was James's first book and it was written at the same time as Henry James wrote the novel meant as tribute to his father, *The Bostonians*. Henry James also addresses the common sense dichotomy in this early novel. Still, some commentators seem to ignore this early account of the typology, despite its similarities to the later one.

According to Lewis the influence was due to personal contact, as the brothers had been together during James's writing of *Varieties* in 1901 and William even used Henry's typist, Mary Weld. Henry read the finished version of *Varieties* in 1902 as he was finishing *Wings of a Dove*, and consequently its influence can be discerned only in his later works, not before *Golden Bowl*. Another commentator even suggests that Alice James anticipates the distinction in her diary, which she began in 1889 (Tessitore 494)!

In actuality, all three siblings, William, Henry, and Alice suffered from depression, to a greater or lesser extent, and all of them knew about the primary typology

by no later than 1884, and possibly earlier.<sup>13</sup> William James had spent time with Henry while writing *Remains* as well (Richardson 231), and *The Bostonians* clearly relies on the primary typology to delineate important differences between characters. William James exhibits a lifelong concern with the commonsense typology; he first introduces the primary typology in *Literary Remains*, then more fully elaborates it, adding the Newman typology, in *Varieties*.

It is not in the nature of Henry James's art to adopt a single perspective on any issue, but rather to explore the ways in which an idea or situation will generate indefiniteness and uncertainty. William James provides the caveat that: "In their extreme forms, of pure naturalism and pure Salvationism, the two types are violently contrasted; though here, as in most other current classifications, the radical extremes are somewhat ideal abstractions, and the concrete human beings whom we oftenest meet are intermediate varieties and mixtures" (*Varieties* 151). He also acknowledges that sometimes "it is quite arbitrary whether we class the individual as a once-born or a twice-born subject" and that "some men have the completer experience and the higher vocation," by which they develop the amphibious ability to come down on either side of the typological divide. Yet, he still counsels that it would be best for "each man to stay in his own experience . . . and for others to tolerate him there" (420).

These are precisely the kinds of issues that Henry James would find intriguing and most amenable to artistic development, and it is even conceivable that William James

---

<sup>13</sup> Upon the publication of the volume, Henry James and Alice, who was experiencing a bout of depression and living with him, was given a copy by Henry, which caused her to burst into tears at William's kind work.

had his brother in mind when he penned the last one. In any case, Henry James's allusion to his brother's typology will amount to a questioning of the value of staying within one's type, as he will attempt to depict healthy-mindedness with a greater amount of empathy than William, even while having a morbid constitution himself.

Henry James imaginatively explores the possibilities of his brother's typology by putting it to different uses in his fiction, rearranging its components to come out in different ways, thereby suggesting that it was too rigidly constructed by William James. In "The Art of Fiction" he describes experience as "never limited" and "never complete." As "an immense sensibility," it resembles "a kind of huge spiderweb of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind" (474). He counsels writers to "Write from experience and experience only," which comes with a strict requirement to also: "'Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!'" (475). Thus, an imaginative writer like Henry James may even conceive of a world in which the healthy-minded is actually the highest type, as in the world of *The Golden Bowl* in which Maggie's once-born character copes with disappointment without ever giving in to despair. James's imaginative approach to William James's typology envisions possibilities that go beyond the account given in *Varieties*.

### III. Santayana's Significance for James's Typology

If one accepts the standard reading of James's primary typology, then his goal in introducing the Newman typology is to accentuate the ways in which the sick soul represents a spiritual development that surpasses the simpler religious sentiments of

healthy-minded individuals. In fact, this intent is also reflected in James's choice of words. His French translator complained that the two types were expressed in grammatically incongruent terms, and that it made more sense if he just used morbid-mindedness and healthy-mindedness, for these would constitute a grammatically parallel construction.<sup>14</sup> But, James, ever the consummate rhetorician, must have realized that the extra term with its non-derived noun served to further accentuate its perceived nature as that of a final, arrived at condition that surpassed its rival in maturity and complexity.

This perspective, however, suffers from some internal contradictions that make it difficult to uphold in the manner that James intended, for his serial method exceeds the constraints that he wishes to place on his typology. One surprising result of his analysis is that James identifies the least extreme form of morbid-mindedness as the classical attitude of the Greeks, particularly as expressed in Stoicism and Epicureanism. Jerome Bruner, a sympathetic defender of James, must acknowledge that James can at times appear too militantly Protestant in such passages: "Surely, it is odd to pin the label of 'sick-minded' on Epicureanism and Stoicism. Is Catholicism also 'sick-minded,' weighed down as it is with Original Sin?" (80). But, if James may have indeed wished to enhance the domain of Protestantism by extending its presence further back into history, he also may have had Santayana in mind in such passages. Santayana, after all, represented a genuine "specimen" of this religious type, and James knew all too well that Santayana's character did not confirm his characterizations of Catholicism as a healthy-minded

---

<sup>14</sup> See Gale 256-57 fn 6.

religion. Santayana, ever the pessimist who always manages to evade despair, is the very antithesis of blue sky optimism or anything resembling it.

Bruner fails to note just how contradictory James's account of the major types turns out to be, for James criticizes Epicureanism and Stoicism for leaving "the world in the shape of an unreconciled contradiction" because their proponents "seek no higher unity" (132). Yet, in a later footnote, he provides the contrary thesis that gives support to Armstrong's contention that James places healthy-mindedness at the bottom of his epistemological scale and the twice-born, as a synthesis, at the top. The twice-born, sick soul represents "The 'heroic' or 'solemn' way in which life comes to them as a 'higher synthesis' into which healthy-mindedness and morbidness both enter and combine. Evil is not evaded, but sublated in the higher religious cheer of these persons" (420 fn). But, then, how can the twice-born Epicurean fail to achieve a higher synthesis, as he claims earlier, and still belong to the twice-born, sick soul type?

Noting other passages lacking in consistency on this issue, James O. Pawelski in *The Dynamic Individualism of William James* challenges the popular reading of James's typology: "Although it is tempting to make the facile identification between the once-born and the healthy-mindedness and between the twice-born and the morbid-minded, most of the textual evidence argues that, while the morbid-minded are of the twice-born type, the healthy-minded may be of either the once-born or the twice-born type" (76). Pawelski arrives at his conclusions by examining passages in which James seems to contradict the accepted reading of his typology, although he must still acknowledge that no final solution is available for the problems generated by James's inconsistent use of his typologies, and that other interpretations remain feasible.

According to Pawelski, James does at times imply that both the primary typology and Newman's are synonymous, but taken at face value this creates some serious inconsistencies. Describing the shallowest form of healthy-minded religion, "mind cure," James admits that "it rests . . . [on] nothing more than the general basis of all religious experience, the fact that man has a dual nature, and is connected with two spheres of thought, a shallow lower and profounder sphere, in either of which he may learn to live" (Varieties 93, Pawelski 76). Clearly, this characterization cannot be reconciled with the view that only morbid-minded individuals can achieve the higher synthesis of a twice-born perspective. Pawelski's analysis also finds support in James's most explicit suggestion of the idea that all types are capable of such an experience: "In our future examples, even of the simplest and healthiest-minded type of religious consciousness, we shall find this complex sacrificial constitution, in which a higher happiness holds a lower unhappiness in check" (Varieties 54, Pawelski 76). He might have added James's statement from his earlier talk, "Is Life worth Living?" in which James argues that if everyone were imbued with the optimism of a Whitman, the question would be meaningless. Yet, he still adds that "In the deepest heart of all of us there is a corner in which the ultimate mystery of things works sadly" (1).

Pawelski's analysis yields a type that James never explicitly discusses: the healthy-minded, twice-born individual. This type never gets lost in a world of despair, but can still acknowledge the existence, and even the sometimes over-predominance, of evil in the world. Although Pawelski does not address the issue of paganism specifically, his perspective has the great virtue of reducing the contradiction generated by subsuming the pagan Epicurus (and by implication Santayana) under the rubric of the

sick soul, for now they could be considered twice-born, healthy-minded types, who do achieve a higher synthesis, but in a different manner. But, this would also undermine the Protestant bias of James's typology by extending a similar gravitas to Catholicism as James wants to lavish on Protestantism. And, if the healthy-minded could also achieve a higher synthesis, why not also see it as superior to the sick soul?

Taking Santayana as exemplary of the type, a twice-born, healthy-minded individual accepts the kind of moral pluralism that James detested – one that quarantines evil – and can live within a more limited perspective that disallows salvation, beyond that of beauty and art, without trivializing the suffering that accompanies life. Conversion for such individuals is not preceded by bouts of existential angst. Nor would they experience conversion as a radical shift into an ultra-optimistic attitude as do sick souls. A twice-born, healthy-minded individual might say: “There need not be continuous sunshine for there to be light. Cloudy days and darkness can be acknowledged for what they are without obliterating the pleasures of a beautiful, sunny day. Let us endure the former, in order to enjoy the latter.” No need exists for melodrama in a world that often disappoints, for it can also at times surprise us with beauty and unexpected, exquisite pleasures.

Pawelski's perspective, however, suffers from the great flaw that it does not truly reflect James's unique personality or his approach to doing philosophy. Had he simply proposed his interpretation as a modification of James's views, rather than an interpretation of his actual beliefs, he might have been more effective. It is not surprising that Pawelski was able to develop a view that could in principle more easily accommodate pagan perspectives, since he privileges James's phenomenology over his

existentialism when he assumes that for James the concept of the reflex arc, first developed in his psychology, remains the central structuring principle of his thinking throughout his works, giving them a unity that they would lack otherwise. Within such a perspective, James's serial study quietly loses its existential edge; its extreme types no longer serve to skew the matter in the direction that he wishes it to go. Arguably, James cannot be contained within Pawelski's general schema, and the tone of it would likely be as anathema to James as was Santayana's.

#### IV. Morality and the Puritan Ethos

Words are like machines; they become outmoded and break down. They can be taken for granted and suffer from not being serviced regularly, or they can be tinkered with by incompetent users who do them more ill than good. Furthermore, the reality which may have provoked a word to erupt into usage to begin with may have shifted over time, obscuring the original meaning for contemporary users. When a word ceases to function as it once did, we must decide what to do about it. Should we dispose of it and fashion a new one, or retool the one that we have? Yet, the decision to do away with or modify any word cannot be arbitrary, but must remain attuned to popular usage and historical context.

Peter Berger, in *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, describes one way in which the word religion has been defined. Berger invites his readers to ponder the question of what "recipe" "a combination of Moses and Machiavelli" could recommend for ensuring the continuation of the social order, suddenly created "*ex nihilo*." Assuming an emerging society that has had all enemies

extinguished or vanquished and also has the perennial problem of succession fairly disposed, its next task would have to be justifying its continued existence in the eyes of its inhabitants. The recipe most often implemented throughout history has been to “hide” the fact that society represents a created order, and make “it appear as the manifestation of something that has been existent from the beginning of time, or at least from the beginning of this group.” In other words, “Let them believe that, in acting out the institutional programs that have been imposed upon them, they are but realizing the deepest aspirations of their own being and putting themselves in harmony with the fundamental order of the universe” (33).

The Lutheran Berger’s perspective may not be as universal as he argues, but it does seem to describe some essential aspects of the initial experience of the early Puritans’ self-understanding in seventeenth-century America. These European settlers had a very clear vision of how their religion was to determine the future of the nation they hoped to establish. If Protestants had freed themselves from the corruption of Catholicism that had only served to vitiate the original message of Christianity, then the Puritans were going to set religion back on its proper course by living up to a moral covenant with God. America would in this fashion become a nation to be admired by the world, an exemplar of how human beings could live moral lives and ensure that God’s wrath would come down on the wicked, thereby protecting the religious social order.

This was unrealistic on two counts. First, nature (along with its indigenous inhabitants) was left out of account as a possible impediment to creating such a society. Second, the basic maxim that moral austerity wanes in the face of great financial success runs counter to the Puritan schema in ways that they never anticipated. Consequently,

Puritan concerns have led to a crisis of how to conceive of the relationship between ethics and religion, according to Richard Forrer.<sup>15</sup> The Puritan's new covenant definition of religion and God's involvement in the world creates the "Puritan dilemma." Since those who stray from the path of Christian purity are not punished, then God must be inconsistent, which is unexpected and disappointing for a people who have invested so much on the future prospects of divine intervention. Hence, after the first three decades of Puritan hegemony and concomitant economic success concerns begins to emerge that resemble Kierkegaard's later existential philosophy in which God, as the almighty, need not abide by his own rules (Forrer 613-14).

Forrer argues that this dilemma continues to generate controversies throughout American history, taking on different forms at different times. T. J. Jackson Lears takes a similar approach as he briefly describes the continuing legacy of the Puritan "ambivalence towards material progress" that this initial defining moment bequeathed to future generations: "Puritan divines urged diligence and frugality, then fretted over the prosperity resulting from those habits. Wealth was a sign of God's blessing but also an agent of corruption. Freed from adversity, men inevitably sank into slothful ease. Economic success contained the seeds of moral failure" (26).

Relying on Berger's sociological framework, he emphasizes that "religion has traditionally played a key role in the social construction of reality – the process by which people construct frameworks of meaning to extract an ordered sense of reality from the blooming buzzing confusion of experience." When these break down, people experience

---

<sup>15</sup> In "The Puritan Religious Dilemma: The Ethical Dimensions of God's Sovereignty."

a sense of loss and confusion that has since become a hallmark of modern societies: “As supernatural frameworks of meaning were evaporating; they felt doomed to spiritual homelessness. As supernatural frameworks of meaning become problematic, individuals slide into anomie; the sense of a coherent universe wavers; reality seems to slip out of focus and blur into unreality” (42).

For Lears, the emerging concern over finding a meaning in life indicates that America has during this time reached the beginning of “what Nietzsche had called a ‘weightless’ period.” For the latter suggests that secularization represents a component part of a greater overall tendency which includes “a general blurring of moral and cultural boundaries and loosening of emotional ties, a weakening of the conviction that certain principles, certain standards of conduct, must remain inviolable, and a loss of the gravity imparted to human experience by a supernatural framework of meaning” (41). Hence, Lears also arrives at the conclusion that existentialist motifs early became an endemic part of the American experience, becoming a permanent part of the American scene around the turn of the century.

In America, however, this experience retains the unique dimension bequeathed to it by the early Puritans. Forrer notes that the theological debates which became entangled in Kierkegaardian type-concerns received a further elaboration in the literary works of Hawthorne and Emerson. The latter, for example, wrote an essay, “Fate” in 1860, which qualifies his earlier, more naïve views of “Nature,” written in 1836. In the earlier essay, he takes a stance that resembles the initial attitudes of the early settlers, who had ignored the possibility that nature could pose an obstacle to their project, for Emerson sees nature as a purely cooperative agent to human hopes and aspirations. In the later essay,

however, Emerson develops a more complex view that adds the notion of a double consciousness to the relationship between human beings and their environment.

Emerson now comes to see nature as both a limiting factor upon human beings' capacities through its deterministic forces, as well as a motive force for good through its inscribed divine purpose. Borrowing a metaphor from the circus that is reminiscent of Plato, human beings must either jump alternatively from one horse to another, or ride atop both of them, securing "one foot on the back of one and the other on the back of the other." When someone finds himself to be "the victim of his fate . . . he is to take sides with the Deity who secures universal benefit by his pain (p. 351)" (Forrer 627).

Because the Puritan dilemma remains such an indelible part of the American experience, Forrer argues that "American literature could be studied for the extent to which writers variously reformulate and explore the Puritan dilemma in terms commensurate with our changing experience." This, in turn "might help us to better understand how Puritan forms of thought and feeling, as Kenneth Murdock reminds us, have significantly shaped the form and substance of our literary tradition" (628). Each historical era must confront this dilemma anew, further developing the possibilities that it engenders.

As a later example, one might consider how Puritanism finds expression in *The Great Gatsby*, which was written at a time of renewed Puritan fervor in America. Nick Carraway, the meticulous narrator of F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel, consistently confronts situations that call for an emotional response that he seems unable to elicit from himself. When he initiates a romantic relationship with Jordan, for example, he is unable to give in to his emotions on account of the relatively minor circumstance that he has

been signing a letter to a woman back home, “Love Nick” (58). Earlier, he has acknowledged that he is not engaged to this woman, but only rumored to be engaged; still, he finds these circumstances sufficient grounds to avoid giving in to his emotions: “for a moment I thought I loved her. But I am slow-thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on my desires, and I knew that first I had to get myself definitely out of that tangle back home” (58). Each time that Nick has to respond to life in a human, emotional way, he encounters some rule or obligation that keeps him from doing so.

Santayana will also examine the inner life of a Puritan narrator who is intelligent enough to acknowledge his limitations in the novel *The Last Puritan*, but his analysis will go much deeper than Fitzgerald’s descriptions, which remain within the framework of the tension exhibited throughout the novel between Nick’s overly-restrained approach to life, and Jay Gatsby’s Romantic, idealistic reinventing of himself in order to regain the love of Daisy, a woman he fell in love with but was too poor to marry several years earlier. Santayana gives great depth to his character, who can more clearly articulate his situation as that of the Puritan dilemma for he represents the ultimate Puritan. Santayana delves into this religious attitude and compares it to that of other characters from different religious backgrounds, establishing a perspective within which no particular religious tradition appears to be either completely adequate or a dismal failure.

This is not to imply that Santayana’s Catholic background is not an important factor in developing Santayana’s perspective or that his novel does not represent a critique of the Puritan ethos, particularly the kind of Puritanism that he examines, one that has been reshaped by romanticism and transcendentalism. Rather, Santayana exemplifies Forrer’s further observation that “other religious traditions have also

contributed, some less directly than others, to this cultural debate [about the Puritan dilemma]. An examination of their solutions might suggest not only important relationships between otherwise diverse traditions, but also their distinctive ‘Americanness’” (628).

In his novel, Santayana does not endorse any perspective in the traditional sense because he rejects all forms of supernaturalism. Santayana’s essay “A Religion of Disillusion” opens with an observation that may well have been, at least partly, directed at William James: “The break-up of traditional systems and the disappearance of a recognized authority from the religious world have naturally led to many attempts at philosophic reconstructions. Most of these are timid compromises, which leave first principles untouched and contain in a veiled form all the old contradictions” (234). In “Ultimate Disillusion and Philosophic Truth,” Willard E. Arnett argues that disillusion is central to Santayana’s philosophy because Santayana does not look to replace the self-assuring theological assumptions of the past with new and more secure ones, but rather accepts the imaginative, creative core of religions without recourse to the desperate appeals or spurious supports.

Santayana’s approach in philosophy was to address issues within the modern context, only to show that American thinking concerning the matter always remained within a restricted subset of the possibilities available, and that this tendency always served to diminish the value of the American response. To a technical critique of his concept of spirit, for example, Santayana replies: “But the concept of spirit doesn’t interest me, except as a technicality; it is the life of spirit that I am talking about, the question what good, if any, there is in living, and where our treasure, if any, is to be laid

up. It is a religious question” (Apologia 606). For Santayana, any inquiry into the meaning of life must begin at its historical source – the classical question of the good. And, that it constitutes a religious question implies, rather than precludes, the pagan *Weltanschauung* from within which the question first emerged.

Santayana’s writings on the genteel tradition represent a complex analysis of the Puritan dilemma and its vicissitudes. In “The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy,” Santayana praises the James brothers for having, in different ways, overcome the pitfalls of the genteel tradition, which Santayana identifies as impeding genuine poetry from emerging for a whole generation of authors who flourished in the oppressive shadow of an attenuated Calvinism that prevented them from confessing their unhappiness:

Serious poetry, profound religion (Calvinism, for instance), are the joys of an unhappiness that confesses itself; but when a genteel tradition forbids people to confess that they are unhappy, serious poetry and profound religion are closed to them by that; and since human life, in its depths, cannot then express itself openly, imagination is driven for comfort into abstract arts, where human circumstances are lost sight of, and human problems dissolve in a purer medium. The pressure of care is thus relieved, without its quietus being found in intelligence. (46)

William and Henry James, clearly reared within the confines of the genteel, manage in different ways to evade its stifling effects, though Vernon Parrington believed that Henry, at least, had not evaded them. William James, Santayana argues, does it “the romantic way, by extending it [the genteel tradition] into its opposite” (54). Henry James’s approach is more congenial to Santayana: “Mr. Henry James has done it by adopting the point of view of the outer world, and by turning the genteel American tradition, as he turns everything else, into a subject-matter for analysis” (54).

William James's relation to the genteel tradition, however, is more complex for Santayana than his statement concerning the romantic in James suggests. Santayana's relationship to and critique of James requires an elaborate analysis that, in any case, goes beyond this issue. One must consider James's complex character and the philosophy that it helps to generate, along with his strong Protestant leanings and Santayana's protracted, lifelong reaction to the man and his philosophy. Santayana never wrote a comprehensive account of James's philosophy, probably because James's inconsistencies grated too deeply on him. He did, however, write brief essays on James and his ideas as well as correspond with him. He also alludes to James's character and ideas in various ways.

## Chapter2: Pragmatism in William James and Santayana

### I. James's Complex Philosophical Legacy

Concerning a Ph.D. thesis about his work, William James complains that the student takes “utterances of mine written at different dates, for different audiences belonging to different universes of discourse” and consequently fails to understand him because she first needed to grasp “his center of vision, by an act of imagination.” He reacts to her interpretation “with admiration and abhorrence.”<sup>16</sup> Perhaps, James would react in a similar fashion to many contemporary analyses of his work, since the general consensus is that James's philosophy fails to achieve consistency on important issues. Scholars from diverse intellectual traditions have also argued that James went beyond pragmatism and even contributed significantly to other philosophical movements such as phenomenology and existentialism.

Two general scholarly approaches have emerged in response to the disunity of James's overall philosophy.<sup>17</sup> One simply acknowledges that James's ambivalence on important philosophical issues is essential to his thinking: either an irreducible aspect of his character, or the result of his attempting to reconcile ultimately incompatible positions. Another tries to show that James was close to achieving a synthesis, but died before he could complete it. In either case: “Interpreters of Nietzsche and James run into the same problem: any discursive recounting of their arguments must justify itself against the more allusive literary style of the original” (Seigfried 4).

---

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Townsend 28-29.

<sup>17</sup> See “Methods of Interpreting James” in Pawelski..

Contrary to James's judgment on the matter, his philosophy does have a bifurcated center that resists straightforward unification: a scientific and a religious one. The conflict that James experienced between these antithetical worldviews generated a lifelong tension that caused him to fluctuate between the two in an attempt to find a compromise that could resolve it.

James's thinking varies in tone from within each of these visions; at its center, each has a metaphilosophical dichotomy of temperaments that while similar in essential respects, places the main emphasis on opposing poles. When writing from his view of the scientific perspective as in *Pragmatism*, James privileges the tough-minded over the tender. In *Varieties*, however, he reverses polarities, privileging the morbid-minded over the healthy. Although the two typologies use different designations for the character types, they both share several overlapping features; one most significant characteristic that suggests a correspondence between them is that both the tough-minded and the healthy-minded feel compelled to adopt pluralism in philosophy, while the tender, morbid-minded will become monists. The overlapping characteristic of monist and pluralist is a decisive one for determining how each will perceive the world and behave towards it, and the defining characteristics pertaining to each remain constant across the differing designations.

By privileging the tough over the tender in his pragmatic philosophy, but the morbid over the healthy in his study of religions, James creates a paradox, for this means that he posits as primary one conception of reality in one area of his thinking, and the opposite one in the other. James's dichotomies have an existential suggestiveness that leaves little doubt as to where his preferences lie. No doubt, he is speaking to different

audiences about different kinds of issues. Still, it remains puzzling how he could find solace in a religious perspective that forced him to view the world in a way that contradicts his cherished scientific view of reality, one that is pluralistic and less forceful in addressing moral issues.

In *The Divided Self of William James*, Richard Gale presents a strong case against the tendency to downplay or avoid facing the pervasiveness of James's competing visions of reality: "The conflict that James felt so acutely did not so much concern the choice of a profession, as has been contended by many of his psychobiographers, as it concerned what existential stance to take toward the world. In particular, should it be that of the scientist, religious believer, moral agent, aesthete, or mystic?" (2-3). His protean character and writings have made him vulnerable to what Gale deems to be "misappropriations"; hence, James has been claimed by Phenomenologists, Existentialists, Materialists, analytic philosophers, and deconstructionists, among others (20); "Most prominent of these self-serving portrayals of James were the naturalistic interpretations, in which all the mystical and spiritual aspects of James's philosophy. . . were neglected. The original and by far most influential of these distorting naturalistic interpreters was John Dewey" (335).

While James scholars concur on the existence of a fundamental tension in James, they do disagree as to its origins and extensity, or even on how it ought to be characterized. Gale identifies James's major life conflict as occurring between his Promethean side and his mystical one, characterizing it as a "Big Aporia," which manifests itself as "a clash between his pragmatic self's metadoctrine of Ontological Relativism – that all reality claims must be relativized to a person at a time – and the

absolute, nonrelativized reality claims he based on mystical experience” (19). If many interpreters have failed to realize the significance of the latter for James, Gale claims, it is because “mysticism is not one of the fashionable movements in the professional circles within which they move” (21).

In contrast to Gale, Charles Taylor in *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* focuses on the incommensurability of the scientific paradigm with that of the religious as the major source of conflict in James. Gale also acknowledges that James experienced a conflict between religion and science, but sees this tension as belonging to the Promethean side of his thinking, which, in turn clashes with his absolutist, mystical self. Gale does not intend to deliver a devastating blow to James’s philosophy, but rather is very appreciative of James, whom he sees as having developed two philosophies worthy of serious examination. The problem, of course, is that it remains impossible to subscribe to both philosophical perspectives simultaneously.

Unlike Gale, Taylor finds the greatest value in James to be in the actual clash of worldviews that ultimately shows that these remain essential for our thinking, despite their incommensurability. If one’s thinking begins with assumptions derived from a scientific perspective, then religious ideas are ruled out as merely speculative. Yet, our “gut” often tells us that there must be some purpose at work in the universe beyond exploding gas clouds and incidental variations that have coincided to produce human life. Consequently, our society cannot function solely on the basis of either paradigm, for “Each stance creates in a sense a total environment, in the sense that whatever considerations occur in one appear transformed in the other.” No considerations exist

that can settle the matter because as these “pass from one stance to the other they bear a changed meaning that robs them of their force in the new environment” (55).

Our contemporary impasse, according to Taylor, is that we are unable to culturally unite under either the scientific or the religious perspective: “(1) Each side is drawing on very different sources, and (2) our culture as whole cannot seem to get to a point where one of these no longer speaks to us. And yet (3) we cannot seem to function at all unless we relate to one or the other” (53). If James manages to come down on the side of religion, it is in a very tenuous manner, for Taylor concedes that he has “abandoned so much of the traditional ground of religion, because he has no use for collective connections through sacraments or ways of life” (58).

Although Taylor makes no mention of it, only by also altering the scientific paradigm (when James broadens the traditional empiricist concept of experience), does he manage to become “our great philosopher of the cusp”: “He tells us more than anyone else about what it’s like to stand in that open space and feel the winds pulling you now here now there. He describes a crucial site of modernity and articulates the decisive drama enacted there.” Furthermore, James’s character and unique intellectual constitution place him in an ideal position to best articulate the key components of this drama, as he “had been through a searing experience of ‘morbidity’ and had come out the other side.” He also possessed “wide sympathy, and extraordinary powers of phenomenological description.” Most importantly, James had the requisite ability to “feel and articulate the continuing ambivalence in himself” (59).

For Taylor, James becomes a Virgilian hero, who having witnessed firsthand “*lacrimae rerum*,” has barely made it to the other side, yet has still managed to do so;

and, in the process, has partially lighted the way for the rest of us. James has confronted agnosticism – but has he scored a definitive victory? Santayana argues that James remained an agnostic on important issues. Arguably, James’s attempt to create a unified perspective must count, even by Taylor’s account, as a Pyrrhic victory that has ceded too much of significance in the process. When Santayana seems to attempt a rapprochement with James, he highlights the “tears in things” in his own thinking.<sup>18</sup> Ironically, it is James who needs the aid of an optimistic outlook in his life, and it is doubtful that he would have found a philosophy of the “cusp” to be the kind of salutary outcome he had in mind to develop.

Since Gale’s “Promethean” side of the Big Aporia subtends the conflict between science and religion as a relatively minor aporia and since the mystical could be seen as a characteristic relating to religion, the differences between Gale and Taylor, concerning how each understands the origins of the conflict in James, are not as great as they may first appear. In terms of what the major tension means, however, they do differ significantly. Gale’s most significant contribution to James scholarship generally consists in his detailed account of the many contradictions that mar James’s philosophy and character, while Taylor’s characterization of the great tension in James’s life seems more intuitive and better adjusted to the historical context. A great weakness of his account, however, remains that it christens James a prophet, but only by turning his greatest weakness into a putative strength.

---

<sup>18</sup> In a letter analyzed in chapter three, he hopes people will recognize the sadness in his five volume work *The Life of Reason*.

The idea that James relies on the primary typology when speaking principally from a religious center is justified by its having been proposed by him consistently within the context of his most extended works on religion, *The Literary Remains* and *Varieties*. The intimate connection between both works is conclusively established by Richardson. In *The Literary Remains* James “notes the difference between the pluralism – indeed the polytheism – of popular religion (commonsense theism, he calls it, and he points to the multiple gods, saints, and devils of popular Christianity) and what he sees as the much rarer ‘ultra phenomenal unity’ of true monotheism” (251). According to Richardson, ultimately, all the essential assumptions – perhaps, better to say tensions – of *Varieties* are prefigured in this introduction (248-53). Although an indispensable intellectual biography, Richardson overshoots the mark in this instance, for in *Varieties* James alters and complicates the ideas introduced in *Literary Remains*, written fifteen years earlier.

An important attempt to see the two works as proceeding from the same basic assumptions was made by Julius Seeley Bixler, who is ignored by both Richardson and Gale.<sup>19</sup> After examining Bixler’s views, however, Pawelski criticizes him for missing the fact that if James’s earlier work may have equated activity, morality, and pluralism on the one hand, and passivity, religion, and monism on the other, the later one did not.<sup>20</sup> Bixler’s attempts to expand the contrasting types into an overarching scheme that divides all of James’s philosophy into either active (healthy) or passive (morbid). But in his sympathetic critique of Bixler, Pawelski seems to suggest, as have others, that the terms

---

<sup>19</sup> In his 1926 *Religion in the Philosophy of William James*,

<sup>20</sup> Bixler’s book *Religion in the Philosophy of William James* was published in 1926.

healthy-minded and morbid were first coined in *Varieties*, which is false.<sup>21</sup> “But healthy-mindedness is not the whole of life; and the *morbid* view, as one by contrast may call it, asks for a philosophy very different from that of absolute moralism” (*Literary Remains* 117). Pawelski correctly stresses, however, the differences between the two works, since James changes some definitions and adds the Newman typology among other things, in the latter work (Pawelski (68-71).

Yet, Richardson’s claim that the two works are intimately related remains feasible, as he notes that “The testamentary method of *Varieties of Religious Experience* is here hinted at” (250). Actually, James includes what in retrospect sounds like a programmatic description for his later work in *Literary Remains*: “The experience in question has always been an acute despair, passing over into an equally acute optimism, through a passion of renunciation of the self and surrender to a higher power.” If James finds this to be the merit of his father’s work, he also adds: “Doubtless it would be easy enough to muster pages of quotations from spiritual literature, – pagan, catholic, and protestant, – which would tally in all essential respects with what my father felt and said about the relation of the Self and the Divine” (James 72).

Richardson also notes that “Throughout this long piece William carefully refers to his subject as ‘Mr. James.’ Only in the last sentence, the sendoff, does he drop the formality and refer simply to ‘my father’ and to the ‘life-long devotion of his faithful heart” (251). Actually, James uses “my father” on several occasions at the beginning of

---

<sup>21</sup> Pawelski agrees with Bixler that this represents a tension between perception and volition, a part of James’s reflex arc in psychology which also includes intellect (68-70). Pawelski bases his view of James on his psychology, which he believes achieves something close to a unified perspective toward the end of James’s life.

his introduction as well, perhaps to accentuate when he was stepping out of the role as scholarly commentator to state something that he was, on account of his close relationship with his father, personally qualified to affirm with authority. For instance, when he asserts “My father’s own disgust at any abstract statement of his system could hardly be excelled by that of the most positivistic reader” (James 15).

Overall, the difference in tone when James uses the tough / tender-minded distinction partly results from his targeting adherents of the scientific worldview, who will sooner jettison religion than allow for a slackening of the rigorous ideals of science. In contrast, on the two occasions when James relies on the sick / morbid-minded distinction, he is targeting an audience most interested in the religious dimension, who needed to reinforce the conviction that the integrity of religion can be maintained in the face of the advances of scientific philosophy. His initial attempt to do this from a purely religious center, as an introduction to his father’s writings, was a failure with both critics and the public, markedly contrasting with the success of his later work. Hence, the strategy of defending religion in the face of science rang a truer chord to the times than defending an eccentric view of religion that does not improve its chances of success within the modern context.

The manner in which James chooses to engage with different universes of discourse along with the diverse audiences that he targets has deep psychological roots in his relationship with his father. James’s religious views in *Varieties* owe a great deal to James senior’s commitment to Swedenborgian mysticism, with its emphasis on personal experience, even while William James distances himself from the movement as a whole in his introduction. His father’s writings, consistently ignored by all but his closest

friends, enshrined a fate that pained the father and that the son would ardently struggle to avoid: “James’s greatest fear was that he might wind up like his father, who was perceived as a genius, but a very eccentric one whose writings therefore could safely be ignored” (Gale 77).

This emotionally charged situation made him “very sensitive to the suspicions that his tough-minded scientific colleagues had of his interests in disreputable types of psychic and mystical experiences and went to considerable pains to appear as tough-minded as they” (Gale 255). How would a scientific-minded audience react to his exultation of morbid-mindedness? And, when it comes down to it, how healthy-minded would they perceive themselves to be? “Tough-minded” is a designation that anyone in science could gleefully accept, and James knew it. Interpreters already predisposed to this view will find it difficult to resist expunging the morbid-minded in James, particularly as the latter is couched in terms that are closer to Gale’s account of the mystical than to commonly accepted, scientific practice.

Like Gale, Ignas K. Skrupkelis also describes James’s thinking as conflicted.<sup>22</sup> First, James, while subscribing to determinism, also wanted to justify moral freedom. Second, he defended the view “that consciousness was active in organizing experience but also that there was no “world” exterior to experience” (357). The second of these tensions became a pivotal point of contention in the correspondence between Santayana and James, which significantly included a third discussant, Charles August Strong.

---

<sup>22</sup> In *Correspondence* Vol. 11 “Intro.”

The latter had been a student of James who went on to marry a Rockefeller and grew close to Santayana, allowing for Strong to become an important link between the two. Living in Europe and independently wealthy, he expressed his ideas openly to James. Skrupskelis selects these as important traits because James's fame often attracted thinkers who thought it propitious to ingratiate themselves with James, since he represented a potentially powerful ally or mentor (xxvii). James described Strong as having "the very clearest mind I ever knew" (xxviii). Committed to exploring technical issues pertaining to the philosophy of mind, Strong influenced both authors with his incisive discussions on the nature of reality and truth. Early on, during the period corresponding to approximately the last decade of James's life, Strong valued Santayana's ideas for stimulating him to think further on ontological issues. At this time Santayana argued in favor of an objectivist position against Strong's panpsychism (xxx), and the exchanges between them show each struggling with diverse aspects of the issue. Hence, several years after James's death, Strong becomes influential in Santayana's development of the concept of essences, by which the latter comes to adopt a more clearly phenomenological orientation under the rubric of critical realism, of which they both become proponents.

The various introductions to James's vast correspondence represent one of the best sources of introduction to James's "big aporia." Hilary Putnam, in *The Correspondence of William James*, notes that James shared three characteristics with Bergson. First, that experience, most broadly conceived (i.e., beyond the limits that traditional empiricists had placed on it) corresponds to reality. Secondly, that this fundamental reality cannot be reduced to concepts, and finally "that in some way

concepts actually *falsify* the character of unconceptualized experience, which means that all our concepts falsify, and *must* falsify, the ways (note the plural!) that reality most fundamentally is” (*Correspondence* vol. 10 “Intro” xxx). Hence, consciousness shapes an independently existing reality that cannot be fully cognized. Like James, Bergson has been considered a yet to be discovered existentialist (Barrett 15).

The overlap between James and Bergson in these matters becomes a source of James’s radical empiricism, which “in the form of neutral monism subordinates the category of thought, treating it as secondary to the category of pure experience,” according to Skrupskelis. This radical empiricism may be seen to conflict with James’s panpsychism, which “makes thought fundamental and experience subordinate, since the latter is only phenomenal, that is, occurs on the bare surface of what in itself is mental” (xxix). This panpsychism he acquires through “the work of Heymans and Strong.” Unfortunately, James was in the habit of adopting new “isms” without working out the contradictions these generated for his own philosophy, an aspect of his thought that has been attributed to his having come late to philosophy. Some interpreters even value this tendency, for it shows James’s willingness “to display in his published work his uncertainties and hesitations” (Skrupkelis xxiv). One can be open-minded enough to consider different issues from different perspectives, however, and still manage to come down on one side or another of such significant philosophical quandaries, arguably an essential characteristic of philosophical activity. James’s inability to do so remains a weakness of his philosophy.

## II. Santayana and Pragmatism

Amos Funkenstein in “The Polytheism of William James” argues that for both Nietzsche and James, “the criterion of truth – including the truth of religion – . . . [is] its ‘value for life’.” The difference between them is that “the life James has in mind is everyman’s, and no life seems to him of so much greater value than another. He would have abhorred the sacrifice of man for superman, in the name of which Nietzsche attacked Christian morals. James was not the enemy of Christianity, only of theology. Yet both of them extolled the value of pluralism” (108). It is interesting that when it comes to religion Funkenstein identifies James as tender-minded and Nietzsche as tough-minded.

Santayana also finds this Jamesian tension at work in his philosophy: “You may be quite right in thinking that I agree almost entirely with what James means: but I often hate what he says. If he gave up subjectivism, indeterminism, and ghosts, there would be little in ‘pragmatism’, as would then stand, that I could object to” (1:379).<sup>23</sup> Santayana excoriates James for not making explicit “an ethical system, because we can’t determine what is useful or satisfactory without, to some extent, articulating our ideals. That is something which James doesn’t include in his philosophy.” Dewey, at least initially, holds out a better prospective: “he even begins to talk about the ideal object and the intent of ideas!” (1:379). Written a few years after he had completed *Life*, which includes a chapter on intent and repeated allusions to the notion of ideals, this statement suggests that perhaps with Dewey, pragmatism was now coming closer to his views. *Life* was

---

<sup>23</sup> In a letter to Horace Meyer Kallen in 1908.

originally touted as pragmatist in nature (Levinson 3) and praised by Dewey, although both came to eventually realize that they disagreed with each other, leading to vituperative polemics on both sides.<sup>24</sup>

Thirty years later and almost two decades after James's death, Santayana once again reflects on pragmatism, its inherent ambiguity, and why it always remained problematical for him. In one sense, pragmatism and empiricism "may mean testing ideas by experiment, by an appeal to the object or physical fact, which in ethics would be human nature with its [sic] physical potentialities of achievement and happiness." Taken in this realist fashion, Santayana would embrace them, but in their non-realist sense these movements "may mean accepting every idea as an ultimate fact and absolute standard for itself, and in practice deciding everything by vote, by sentiment or by the actual prevalence of one idea over another. In this second direction lies softness, anarchy, and dissolution" (6:151).

Much like James, Santayana wants to adopt "the hard" (tough-minded), but finds that he can't get everything he needs from such a perspective: "Spinoza was not soft. I have been all my life long a fervent disciple of Spinoza precisely on account of his firmness, of his uncompromising naturalism." Yet, Santayana cannot strictly adhere to Spinoza's philosophy because Spinoza fails to provide "a human ideal" that could encompass, without embracing "cosmological errors," Santayana's most vaunted traditions: "the Greek, the Catholic, and the Indian" (6:151). Most importantly,

---

<sup>24</sup> For an account of the debate, see "Santayana, Dewey, and the Politics of Transition" in Levin.

Spinoza's perspective "leaves out poetry, art, traditional religion, military and constructive patriotism." In a somewhat Nietzschean vein, Santayana concludes: "His . . . would be a tame society, where there would be no masters, but all would be voluntary slaves. Perhaps you feel something of my difficulty when you point out that art is an indispensable ingredient" (6:152). By leaving out of account so much of the social fabric that creates human distinctions, Spinoza avoids becoming soft, but only by abstaining from adjudicating important issues pertaining to ethics and aesthetics.

Santayana's pragmatism represents an attempt to examine the nature of ethics and aesthetics within a realist framework. In his quest to establish a way to analyze and vindicate the significance of human ideals, Santayana sought a philosophy that would be able to identify a sphere of reality that exists independently from human feelings and any particular understanding of it (realism). Pragmatism's commitment to remaining within the realm of human experience, however, makes the aesthetic problematic, for its components, if viewed as independent from external reality, can result in an idealist position that rarefies mental experience as the only truly existent reality, something that James has most often been accused of doing. These difficulties create a predicament for pragmatists that they have often avoided by minimizing the role of aesthetic experience in their thinking (Levin 72), which Santayana sees as leading to the indiscriminate acceptance of any idea, along the lines suggested by Funkenstein.

Jonathan Levin describes the pragmatic side of Santayana's philosophy and how it relates to other American thinkers. His book, *The Poetics of Transition: Emerson, Pragmatism, and American Literary Modernism*, is an indispensable work for anyone interested in research that examines the distinctively American intellectual Zeitgeist. It

concentrates on what he at times refers to as “the metaphors of transition,” an attempt to examine the nature and role of ideas in the context of a reality conceived as being in a constant state of change and without a definite or stable, intervening and fixed conceptual framework that could guarantee any kind of permanence. First elucidated by Emerson, the metaphors of transition has influenced, sometimes in tacit ways, many who followed, but most especially the pragmatists.

Levin’s account of Santayana’s contribution to pragmatic thought stresses the nexus between Santayana’s basic assumptions in his first book *The Sense of Beauty*, and James’s “Stream of Thought” chapter in *Principles*, emphasizing how he adopts “James’s claim that feelings of and, if, but, and by are as empirically real as feelings of blue and cold” (69). In the face of longstanding philosophical tradition for which logical relations constitute entities not discoverable in experience, James claims this to have been mistaken. For him, experience does encompass states that go beyond the discrete sense data of the British empiricists. This is not James the psychologist, but the phenomenologist, who understands that “thinking is not reducible to particular conceptions or abstractions, since a large part of the thinking process is the transitive relating of the different substantive elements of thought” (70).<sup>25</sup>

Santayana draws on this seminal Jamesian insight throughout his philosophical thinking, a central tenet of his “aesthetic and religious attitudes: felt unities and harmonies are valuable not because they point to some overarching or trans-empirical

---

<sup>25</sup> It is best to see this aspect of James as phenomenological in the Husserlian sense, not only for argument that will be adduced below, but because this position constitutes a radical departure from the way that, following in the British tradition, empiricism has come to be understood in current analytic circles for which empiricism revolves around the notion of sense data.

unity or harmony (be it God's, Nature's, or Self's) but because they animate experience, render it meaningful and purposeful, and provide a concrete discipline for sustaining and cultivating its meanings and purposes" (70). His later philosophy makes these commitments more explicit as it adds a description of the realms of spirit and matter, which expand on James's experience-based distinction between substantive and transitive states. Spirit, Santayana surmises, does not create anything new, cannot cause anything to come about in the world of material objects, but merely discovers and contemplates essences that serve to aid the human mind in recognizing different aspects of the world and how these may relate to each other. Each of his realms represents a category of experience that is useful, but not absolute, and may not even be relevant for other thinkers, since they only represent one possible way to sort out experienced reality.<sup>26</sup>

Santayana occupies an essential position for the pragmatic movement generally: "The banishment of Santayana to the margins of the pragmatic project is, ironically, a way of keeping pragmatism pure, reinscribing the antipragmatic divisions between mind and body as well as nature and culture by diminishing our sense of how thoroughly each is implicated in the other" (72). Levin's book represents a challenge to the purity, the univocal non-pluralistic tone, of much post-Deweyian pragmatism, particularly when it comes to aesthetics, the field most marked by Santayana's contribution to pragmatic thought.

---

<sup>26</sup> The four volumes of *The Realms of Being* were published much later in 1937. One volume is devoted to each realm: essence, matter, truth, and spirit.

Levin incisively notes that when neopragmatists, such as Cornell West and Rorty, dismiss the “latent Hegelianism and idealist aestheticism that occasionally surface in pragmatists’ writing,” they implicitly characterize “aesthetic experience” as a term with a univocal signification, whereas “For a pragmatist, art is neither an ornament to life nor a form of leisured indulgence” (5). Aesthetic experience is rather intertwined with the experience of life itself, structuring it in a meaningful way, whether in “popular art,” “sports, romance, ritual, even experiences as mundane as playing with a pet or planning and cooking a meal” (6). Viewed within the context of the “transitional dynamic” described by Levin, the concepts of “wholeness” or “unity” that Dewey for instance occasionally uses do not represent a throwback to Romanticism, but “have the same kind of meaning in relation to religious experience.” Nor do such terms emphasize “the object of experience (be it Art, God, or Spirit), but rather the process the experience sets in motion. This process infuses life with deeper (but never definitive or absolute) meanings” (6). The aesthetic dimension becomes distinct only as an abstraction, albeit a necessary one for analysis, which in actuality encompasses all of human activity.

Levin’s analysis represents a succinct summary of Santayana’s response to the problem described in his letter, concerning the two pragmatisms. Experience remains the unifying basis of all our transitional concepts. He observes that reason for Santayana is expressed in different ways within each area of human experience that he examines in *The Life of Reason*, as reflected in the title of each of the five volumes: reason in common sense, society, religion, art, and science: “Santayana sees reason expressing itself equally, albeit differently, in all of these realms. His safeguard against aestheticizing experience in the pernicious sense inimical to pragmatism, rests on his pragmatic insistence that all

of these functions operate together, indivisibly, in experience” (71). Hence, the “unities and laws” that became the most divisive issue between Santayana and James can be meaningfully examined within a pragmatist perspective, something that must have become a source of increasing irritation for James, whose threshold of acceptance for the conceptual was considerably lower than most philosophers. Levin concludes that although Santayana was, like James, anxious over how abstraction might “prove destructive of primary aesthetic feeling,” he still strove to analyze and write about it, as he considered this activity to be of the greatest importance. This represents Santayana’s defining moment within the pragmatic movement.

The primary tension that Levin alludes to, that between realists and idealists, is one that has come to be seen as intrinsic to pragmatic philosophies: “This gap between James and Santayana . . . must be recognized as a gap *within* pragmatism, one made almost inevitable by the distinct set of intellectual habits and attitudes that pragmatism is” (71). Similarly, Sami Pihlström notes that “Despite all their differences, Peirce’s, James’s, and their followers’ interpretations of pragmatism are united by certain questions they, perhaps permanently leave open. In particular, the problem of *Realism* vs. *idealism* seems to be unavoidable in the pragmatist tradition even today” (24). Some may object to this characterization on the grounds that it is no longer relevant for contemporary philosophy. Even if this happens to be one’s perspective however, “it is equally legitimate to use this traditional opposition to uncover the tensions that remain in pragmatists’ peculiar combinations of realism and idealism” (24).

The paradoxical mixture of cautious intellectual closeness and attenuated animosity that existed between Santayana and James cannot be exhaustively understood,

however, in terms of their differences on pragmatism.<sup>27</sup> That they differed on how it might be developed is true, but this does not account for the antipathy between them, for they were also aware of great areas of agreement on philosophical issues generally. Neither one really thought of themselves as belonging to a particular school of philosophy that so definitively excluded all others, nor did they ever see themselves as belonging to the same school of thought. They each noted the pragmatism of the other and the consequent similarity between their ideas, but these acknowledgements mostly remain within a subtext, publicly shrouded in silence. One may object that James did see himself as a pragmatist. His legendary openness and adoption of contradictory “isms” along with later interpretations of his work, however, suggests that the matter requires a more nuanced understanding, one better rooted in the actual circumstances that helped to generate each philosopher’s ideas.

James and Santayana have strong links to pragmatism. If this identification is pushed too far, however, then a loss in the richness of their respective philosophies ensues. James was too brilliant and restless to achieve such a single-minded perspective, and this is one of the strengths of his rich intellectual output. Santayana outlived James by over four decades. Santayana was clearly an American pragmatist while he subscribed to the life of reason, but not when he adopted the tenets of the spiritual life. One may wonder why he ever wrote a second multi-volume work in philosophy that extolled the values of essences, if he did not mean to develop his ideas in a different

---

<sup>27</sup> This topic will be addressed in greater detail in chapter three.

direction. The differences between Santayana and James require a richer context than that of pragmatism.

### III. Santayana's Tethered Bird Analogy

In his *Persons and Places*, Santayana compares James to a bird that, tethered to the ground, remains unable to truly fly (401). Furthermore, he accuses James's philosophy of never getting anywhere, and this gesture along with Santayana's general tone toward James in his characterizations of him has been understandably taken as most callous, coming from someone who owed James a great deal. Probably, the issue also revolves around the matter of venue: Santayana does not make this statement in a letter to a friend, but in his autobiography, so that it acquires the sense of a final word on the matter. Moreover, the biography adheres to this harsh tone throughout, creating a negative impression that has contributed to undermining Santayana's legacy.

One context in which this analogy is often recognized as valid is in James's moral philosophy. Gale reviews a technical argument concerning free will that James makes in *Will to Believe*, the gist of which is that we may sometimes be in a position, depending on how our actions may combine with those of others, in which by making a relatively small decision, we might end up becoming the definitive causal factor in a fateful world-changing event (87-90). Gale thinks this is James at his most Promethean, for "As a result of our relatively few acts of free will, the entire fate of the world can be sealed for good or ill." Such a radical view can be overwhelming: "it makes our free will so momentous that some will crack under the strain, wanting assurance that forces beyond our control

will assure that the ultimate outcome or denouement of history is a good one, that eventually good wins out over evil” (90).

Unfortunately, James can easily lose his Promethean edge, and quietly slip into his weaker, mystical, anti-Promethean self: “James was among these [mystical] in his sick, morbid-minded moods during which he was racked with existential angst at the thought of the hideous epileptic youth, who represented in general the evils that may befall us” (90). Consequently, James will also argue that his Promethean view does not contradict the possibility that a divine being could be in control of the fate befalling humanity, ensuring that things turn out in keeping with the divine will. Viewed from Taylor’s perspective, this is what James experiences in his most purely religious moments, but Gale’s observation that such instances of helpless dependency exhibit an existential tone has important repercussions for James’s relationship with Santayana.

The story of the epileptic youth was included in *Varieties*, and attributed to a French contributor (146-47). Later, James would admit that the event in question had actually happened to him (*Varieties* 451). Unexpectedly, James becomes wrought with anxiety at the sight of “a black-haired youth with greenish skin” whom he encounters at an asylum because he realizes that nothing that he possesses could protect him from the fate suffered by this youth. This event in his life is reminiscent of his father’s famous *vastation*, consisting in Henry James Sr. suddenly experiencing a mysterious presence that had a similar life-altering effect on him as the asylum youth had on his son (*Literary Remains* 58-66).

James will ultimately insist that his radical view of free will is not incompatible with providence, for no matter how reality may appear to fluctuate between good and evil

– even allowing for moments beyond the control of the deity – the end may still be in keeping with “what he intended it to be from all eternity” (91):

This 180-degree turnaround on the status of evil and the importance of our free acts in combating it is an example of the sort of thing Santayana, no doubt, had in mind when he wrote that James “was really far from free, held back by old instincts, subject to old delusions, restless, spasmodic, self-interrupted: as if some impetuous bird kept flying aloft but always stopped in mid-air, pulled back with a jerk by an invisible wire tethering him to a peg in the ground” (*PP* 401). And he adds, in his characteristic overinflated and unkind manner, that James, as result, “got nowhere.” (91)

Gale’s inference that the analogy applies to James’s moral ambiguity is accurate.

Santayana neither felt it a terrible burden that we all must deal with evil, nor did he express the need for supernatural intervention: “My mother . . . was a Deist: she was sure there was a God, for who else could have made the world? But God was too great to take special thought for man: sacrifices, prayers, churches, and tales of immortality were invented by rascally priests in order to dominate the foolish.” His father, not a Deist, agreed “emphatically” with his mother’s judgment of institutionalized religion (*Confession* 7). James, of course, shared this latter view, but Santayana, from early on in his childhood, experienced religion as an imaginative creation that cannot change anything in this world, a view he never felt the need to change.

Gale accurately acknowledges the legitimacy of Santayana’s bird analogy once again when considering James’s ambivalence about realism, a philosophical position that Gale abhors (137). This aporia hits closer to home, being something that Gale cares about; consequently, having already fulfilled the mandatory condemnation of Santayana, Gale appears to echo the latter’s frustration with some vehemence of his own. Accusing James of essentially qualifying his anti-realist revisionist philosophy with counter-

revisions that have the effect of “undoing his entire theory,” Gale now seems to relish Santayana’s diction, embellishing it with some harsh condemnations of his own:

It is James at his political worst, working his audience so as to win everyone over. In doing so he winds up like Santayana’s bird that soars mightily on the wings of some exciting idea only to be jerked back to earth by a wire tethering it to the ground. Maybe he suffered from vertigo when he soared so high, knowing that a sizable portion of his philosophical audience would think ill of him for undermining their revered concept of truth as the great mirror of nature.

No doubt Gale intends the irony of using Santayana’s harsh judgment to come down on the opposite side of the issue than Santayana does, although the latter’s critical realism did not affirm truth as a mirror of nature. If Gale can become this incensed over James’s “aporias” from afar, it is interesting to imagine how much greater Santayana’s frustration must have been, considering how much closer he was to James the man.

Kuklick identifies these same two basic tensions in James’s work and argues that they find their way into Santayana’s early philosophy. First, James, while subscribing to determinism, also wanted to justify moral freedom in order to justify an active lifestyle. Second, he defended the view “that consciousness was active in organizing experience but also that there was no ‘world’ exterior to experience” (357). According to both Kuklick and Gale, James was ultimately an idealist, rather than a realist.

Kuklick argues that the effect of the two Jamesian tensions, the moral and the ontological, take on a different meaning for Santayana. If James wanted to resolve the moral tension by coming down on the side of moral activism, Santayana wanted to develop a philosophy that would justify passivity, which for him meant having to find a way to characterize reality in accordance with this personal penchant. According to Kuklick, Santayana had witnessed his mother’s and his own helplessness in the face of

several traumatic incidents, such as the death of his aunt Josefina's first son and his own early fate of belonging to a divided family, living first in Spain with his father, then brought to live in Boston with his mother (352). "Santayana's own experience led him to believe in the impotence of consciousness and inclined him to seek a more general warrant for this belief. Rightly or wrongly, he made the tragedy of his family the tragedy of existence itself" (353). This pessimistic ideal Santayana first expresses in his poetry, while his later philosophical work, as Kuklick sees it, was simply an attempt to justify his longstanding attitude towards life. Santayana navigated through the tumultuous waters of Jamesian philosophy only to arrive at something that corresponded to his own unquestioned, personal and idiosyncratic views.

Kuklick is kinder to Santayana than Gale; neither, however, is intentionally unkind to him either from malice or ignorance, but rather treats him as generously as possible given the general bias inculcated in them through a specific kind of education. When analyzed in terms of the intellectual factors that helped shape their respective accounts, however, both of them make meaningful contributions to a better understanding of Santayana and James's relationship.

Kuklick's claim, for example, that "Because James never wrote a comprehensive statement of his philosophy, it is unsatisfying to chronicle the development of his thought" (334) comes across as a remarkable understatement when viewed in the light of Gale's later, more accurate rendering of James's polyglot use of the many isms of modern philosophy. Kuklick provides a very unsatisfying explanation for the inconsistencies that these generate: "although the time devoted to popular lecturing and

writing popular books prevented him from producing a systematic treatise, his guiding principles were implicit in all his works” (334-35).<sup>28</sup>

That so many would accept James’s own account of his “vision” as being in some sense unified is testament to the power of his personality and thought. Speaking of James, Santayana notes that, “what I learned from him was perhaps chiefly things which explicitly he never taught, but which I imbibed from the spirit and background of his teaching” (A Brief History 15). James has also had an analogous impact on the intellectual climate of the United States. For example, the “cognitive turn” – a reaction against behaviorism in the social sciences – is marked by James’s influence, which “has been atmospheric rather than direct and textual” (Proudfoot 83). Something about James’s way of thinking invites this kind of diffused influence. Perhaps James’s impact derives from the way he follows his unique, intuitive style of thinking, which seems to inspire others to develop their own intuitions in analogous ways.

Santayana, Kuklick argues by contrast, comes to his philosophy from a very narrow personal and biased perspective, which Santayana simply hopes to justify in the light of Jamesian ideas. But, as a historian of philosophy, Kuklick does attempt to balance his presentation of both men:

Santayana had every reason to leave Cambridge. Although he was very much a Bostonian and relished the status his professorship conferred, it was not surprising that after he ended his teaching career he was contemptuous of Harvard culture and acerbic in his judgments. What other twentieth-century American academic of major repute spent eighteen years as instructor and assistant professor?

---

<sup>28</sup> In the final section to his “Jamesian Metaphysics” entitled “Tribute.”

Such gestures, however, come across as rather forced, requisite niceties, than genuine statements of appreciation. In contrast, Gale's symbolic embrace of Santayana's frustration with James on epistemological issues speaks volumes on Santayana's behalf.

#### IV. Historical and Rational Reconstructions of Philosophy

Philosophers in America often distinguish themselves from the European philosophical tradition, which they have dubbed continental philosophy. "Richard Rorty . . . suggests that the distinction between traditions essentially consists in the fact that analytic philosophy deals with problems, whereas Continental philosophy deals with proper names" (Critchley 8). Simon Critchley counters this stereotype with the claim that Continentalists deal with problems "*textually* and *Contextually*," which leads to a more seemingly "indirect" approach. Such stereotypes, however, cut both ways, and in America not all scholarship has followed the strict "problems" approach of analytic philosophy.

It is interesting the way both approaches are used on different occasions by Levinson, who has extensively studied the religious views of both William James and Santayana, generating a book-length study on each. In 1981 he published *The Religious Investigations of William James*, a book distinguished by seeing *Varieties* as central for James's thought. Levinson argues that important investigations of James have often been vitiated by presentist assumptions, which entail research that aims to engage with a thinker's ideas only as they pertain to contemporary issues or debates. This means that the "real" James with his unique problems and perspectives, as he lived and thought through them at the turn of the century, is ignored. In the case of James, this has meant

separating his religious views from his philosophy, thereby providing a limited view of each.

Despite the inadequacies of previous attempts to adequately explain James's intellectual output, however, Josiah Royce, Santayana, and Ralph Barton Perry did fulfill an important role in James scholarship, for on the American side "these three thinkers, so intimate with both James and the community of philosophers who survived him, were largely responsible for canonizing his work" (270). Royce and Perry were both clearly presentists in their approaches. The latter became very influential because he was a favorite of James who wrote an influential biography, but with "distortions . . . created by Perry's desire for a usable past" (Kuklick 340). His goal was to dispel idealism in the name of neo-realism.<sup>29</sup> Santayana was not presentist but polemical in his numerous accounts of James's thought, generating a view that mostly characterized him as agnostic concerning truth and religion – a thinker who managed to overcome the genteel tradition, but never made it beyond the land of limbo in Harvard's attempt to answer the question: is life worth living (274-75)?

About a decade after his first book, Levinson published his *Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life*. Now studiously avoiding the term, Levinson quietly slips into a presentist account, as for example, when he argues that Santayana's philosophy can be used to better understand a recent debate between Rorty and Putnam on the nature of truth, as Putnam's criticism of Rorty, he claims, mirrors Santayana's

---

<sup>29</sup> The history of Harvard philosophy involves the development of many different kinds of realisms, creating a complicated history. The best introduction to the diverse kinds of realism at Harvard is Kuklick's.

realist criticism of Jamesian pragmatism (186-92). In a very appreciative review of Levinson's book, Anthony Graybosch finds this argument unconvincing, seeing Santayana as actually closer to Rorty and James, for to begin with, "both [James and Rorty] deny. . . that there is a Truth, a one final version of reality that can either decide true thinking or that is needed as a spur to inquiry" (327). What Rorty and Putnam disagree on is "whether the ultimate guides of inquiry are transcendent or moral." Seen in this manner, Santayana would agree with both Rorty and James, for "surely moral concerns can be as great a spur to inquiry as the idea of a transcendental object of knowledge. Perhaps Levinson really fears that historicism supports quietism" (328). Hence, Levinson, when it comes to this issue, finds himself in precisely the kind of presentist dilemma that he labored to avoid in the case of James.

This change in approach by Levinson demonstrates something important about intellectual history; namely, that the worst posthumous fate that can befall a thinker is not being misrepresented, but being ignored; not the fate that James suffered under well-intentioned critics who found him important enough to quote and debate, but the fate that Santayana, who seems to have been totally written out of the canon, has suffered since the nineteen fifties.

An analysis of the factors surrounding Levinson's two works shows that both modes of presentation can serve opposed yet valid purposes. On the whole, Levinson's Santayana book represents a "rational reconstruction" while his earlier work on James leans heavily in the direction of a "historical reconstruction." The latter aims "to understand what theorists might have said about our present controversies." In contrast, for historical reconstructions, the purpose is to explain what thinkers "did say in the

context of their contemporary controversies. Theoretical pronouncements are situated in their dialogic contexts and placed in relation to other texts of the period that address similar issues and use comparable rhetorical strategies.” This requires “bracketing later developments and suspending judgments about what we know [or think we know] better.” Obviously, the two can be pursued within a single study: “Although a historical reconstruction is analytically distinct from a rational reconstruction, they are regularly conjoined in practice” (5).<sup>30</sup>

Since these approaches are not mutually exclusive, a scholar might switch between them as needed. The choice, however, is not merely stylistic; Levinson relies on historical reconstruction in dealing with James because the latter had become overly familiar with a definite reputation that could be challenged by avoiding a presentist bias, which in point of fact represents little more than a covertly rational account. In contrast, Santayana had become (and still largely remains) a relatively unknown writer – a thinker whose fortunes could be improved by setting him side-by-side with representatives of more current trends. These observations are not meant to imply that Levinson only uses one strategy in each study; his book on Santayana, in particular, is more varied; and, in either case, significant contributions to scholarship can be produced within any combinations of narrative frameworks.

For understanding the relationship between Santayana and James, it is crucial to establish the right balance between these two approaches, but the emphasis must often lie

---

<sup>30</sup> Taken from the introduction to the anthology *The Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists*, in which George Ritzer and Douglas Goodman adopt a modified version of Richard Rorty’s “four genres of historiography.” Only the first two are considered here.

in the direction of a historical reconstruction, precisely because, outside of pragmatism, the modern climate of philosophical opinion does not favor either thinker. If it does somewhat favor James, it is only by the many possibilities inherent in his approach, which can be used to further his importance, but only by distortions that would likely elicit “abhorrence” from James.

Taylor’s book, for example, is concise and incisive in its description of the modern dilemma concerning the conflict between science and religion in our contemporary societies, but he misconstrues James’s conflict by downplaying the ways the religious becomes attenuated in James, while also ignoring the tendentious way he characterizes the workings of science. Consequently, his account of James fails to be totally convincing, because of its presentist claim that James so thoroughly anticipated our current ambivalence toward science and religion. Taylor’s claim, in essence, amounts to saying James was simply justified to remain on the cusp, for this is the best we can hope for given our current situation. Yet James himself felt dismayed by the thought that he lacked a unified vision and knew that it was important to achieve one.

Contemporary interpreters of James often favor the tough-minded view of his philosophy, ignoring that the other, morbid-minded perspective has also been forcefully put forth by James.<sup>31</sup> Dewey has contributed greatly to this view, and Gale devotes an important appendix to refuting his one-sided interpretation of James’s philosophy. Gale, however, generally overstates the case against extending or further developing differing

---

<sup>31</sup> Specialization makes this plausible, since many in philosophy do not feel inclined to study James’s religious views, as these belong to a different field of expertise.

strands of James's philosophy, since it remains feasible to construe these dissimilar philosophical positions as simply constituting diverse, yet still potentially valid – depending on one's methodological approach – aspects of James's thought.

Consequently, if one is careful to avoid an exclusively and distortive presentist approach, as Dewey was not, it remains appropriate to identify James's existentialism, for instance, and how it conflicts with his phenomenology, particularly as such different aspects of the man and his work – for in James all his thoughts are personal and genuine – can help explain what others have come to accept and / or reject in his thinking. All appropriations of elements from any author should be made with a clear admission of their original context and current limitations.

Gale puts forward some valid arguments concerning intellectual history and James's character, which contribute to a valid historical reconstruction. He belongs, however, to the analytic philosophical tradition most dominant in the English-speaking world. Hans Reichenbach refers to it by the more descriptive name of “scientific philosophy.” The latter is not synonymous with the sciences, but rather represents the attempt to restrict philosophy to operating largely within limits imposed by scientific methodology. Reichenbach introduces the term and defines it in contradistinction to a mode of thinking that he dismisses as unproductive in the search for truth. In *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (1951) he states that “philosophy has always been impaired by a confusion of logic with poetry, of rational explanation with imagery, of generality with analogy” (9).

If for Gale, James developed two interesting philosophies worthy of serious attention, Santayana has remained a relatively insignificant footnote to James. Thus,

Gale, in his dismissive account, allows Santayana about all that he is entitled to when viewed from the perspective of academic philosophy in the English-speaking world. Santayana belonged to an era in which it still remained feasible to be a philosopher and not belong to this tradition, and truly historical reconstructions could, ironically, better accentuate his current relevance. Writing in 1947, he addressed Bertrand Russell's omission of his philosophical perspective from Russell's book on the history of the field. Disillusioned, he pointed out that the exclusion "shows that R. was considering me as a logician only, which I am not, and disregarding the real influences that have affected me." He added, "I never wished to be original, so as to contribute to the growth of science. All I care for is to sift the truth from traditional imagination, without [i]mpoverishing the latter" (328-29). Hence, Santayana's concern is with what we may call the remainder, what is left out of the scientific *Zeitgeist*.

These reflections lead to a major difficulty for Santayana scholarship – is he an American philosopher? Is he a pragmatist? Or, should he be read in the context of later European philosophy? One drawback of seeing Santayana through the lens of American pragmatism is that his philosophical output then remains, as described by Kuklick, a fairly repetitive endeavor, relevant only if one already wants to defend such a view as Santayana argues from the start of his career. Pragmatic accounts of Santayana stress the centrality of his vision and not the progress of his thinking. It is, however, possible to interpret Santayana from a more European perspective, as it is possible to do the same with James, up to a point, and this possibility places them in traditions that have been more significant outside the United States, which can favor Santayana, showing him as someone who managed to escape from the shadow of James after all.

## Chapter 3: Phenomenology and Existentialism in William James and Santayana

### I. William James and Santayana: An Ambivalent Relationship

It is a commonplace that character and philosophy were closely linked for both Santayana and James. Kuklick, for example, finds it necessary to consider temperamental differences as a factor in determining philosophical orientations in the department of philosophy at Harvard during James's tenure: "Where it has been plausible, I have shown that the side of a given issue on which a philosopher came down was a matter of temperament. In this I have followed William James and, I suppose, other intellectual historians." Although he claims this to be the case for everyone, he singles Santayana out as the most striking: "The most dramatic example is my treatment of Santayana: the temperamental dimension of the analysis stands out because he differed as much as he did from his colleagues" (xvii). Actually, with greater historical distance, Santayana and James both stand out from others, for a host of factors, including their peculiar, respective characters, which cannot be separated from each one's distinctive upbringing and background.

The personal differences that separated them can be made most explicit by considering their relationship to ideas that have come to be most readily associated with phenomenology and existentialism respectively, each conceived as representing disparate approaches to philosophy, ones that are essentially incompatible in nature. Although neither thought of their differences explicitly in these terms, the decorum, sensibility, or habitus associated with each of these philosophical movements can help explain a great

deal about each thinker's personal and intellectual identity. James and Santayana have in common some interesting connections with phenomenology, but Santayana exhibits none of the pathos of existentialism within his writings. By contrast, James has a very palpable existential vein, in his religious writings especially, that correspond to his twice-born, morbid religious mindset. Consequently, by isolating the more serene-minded phenomenology from the emotionally charged existentialism, two philosophical movements that were, in any case, combined only by later thinkers, we could provide an interesting contrast between James and Santayana, one that coheres with their differing character types and distinctive backgrounds.

Each one's individual history and character created a strong bias toward certain religious and philosophical positions. Santayana was in a unique position to observe the existential ethos at work in James, which represents an ambiguous phenomenon in his case, as it reflects both highly personal and cultural dimensions. While for James philosophy often seemed a burden that he came to only late in life, for Santayana philosophy remains the highest pursuit a human being can engage in, along the classical lines of "the unexamined life is not worth living." Santayana could, in contrast, embrace James's phenomenology that was most predominant in James's early works.

Of course, we are in a much better position to understand this today than they were in their day, since we can more fully comprehend how the different lines of argument exemplified by each philosophical movement have played out. James's existential approach to religions also caused him to experience Santayana as – to borrow

a term James probably used to describe him – “wayward.”<sup>32</sup> James complained of the “tone” of Santayana’s writings as being overly cool and detached, while Santayana found James to be too “haphazard” in his philosophical speculations. Scholars interested in understanding the intricacies of the relationship between Santayana and James have to therefore strike a balance between two opposing tendencies: each was simultaneously attracted and repelled by the work of the other. As close as they felt themselves to be at times, obvious misgivings also emerged for each about the other’s work and demeanor, and this caused them to keep a safe distance from each other.

Santayana and James were different from each other in almost every way conceivable. James came from an affluent family with a traditional stay-at-home mother, devoted to caring for her children while the father, wealthy by inheritance and marred, both physically and emotionally, from having lost a leg in a childhood accident, became a constant, controlling presence in the lives of his children, but also spared them any economic hardships. James went on to marry Alice Gibbons, a caring and understanding woman who saw him through his worse moments; Santayana never married and his sexual orientation remains unclear. He came from a family of relatively modest means, one in which the mother, who had two daughters from a previous marriage, left Santayana and his father in Spain to establish her residence in Cambridge, where a relative from her previous husband had promised to help them. So, at the age of 5, George was separated from his mother for an extended period of time, as she resettled in

---

<sup>32</sup> Strong defends Santayana in a letter responding to James by saying he disagrees with him, by telling James that Santayana is not wayward (Skrupskelis xxx). Since James’s original letter is not extant, it is impossible to know with certainty if James used the term, or if it represents Strong’s paraphrase; either way, it is most appropriate.

America. Theirs became an unusual family arrangement. From the age of nine, the young, impressionable Santayana, having lived away from his mother for some time, now only saw his father in the summers and corresponded with him in Spanish the rest of the time.<sup>33</sup>

Not only were Santayana and James from different social and cultural backgrounds, but their national identity was conceived by each in distinctive ways. Although partly educated in Europe from a young age or maybe because of it, James valued his American identity and thought one ought to live in one's country, as he once complained to his father, who would arbitrarily decide that the family should leave America or return to it to further the children's education.<sup>34</sup> James also subscribed to the active, masculine, American ethos which he helped to develop and came to represent at Harvard. By contrast, despite Santayana's belief that he and his family "were not emigrants; none of us ever changed his country, his class, or his religion," he still adopted English as his dominant language, a decision he never reversed (Confession 3). After his early retirement from Harvard, he described himself as "a man whose spiritual attachments lie in one quarter and his linguistic attachments in another" (Realms 833). He eventually chose Italy as his final residence.

---

<sup>33</sup> For an account of Santayana's early life, see "Origins" and "From Avila to Boston" in McCormick. For James, see footnote 3 below.

<sup>34</sup> See Richardson, "Growing up Zigzag" for an account of James's reactions to his father's frequent change of residence between Europe and the United States. The chapter concludes: "William's rejection of his European schooling was not just the judgment of late years. Sixteen-year-old William sent this conclusion to Ed Winkle at the time: 'We have now been three years abroad. I suppose you would like to know whether our time has been well spent. I think as a general thing, Americans had better keep their children at home'" (24).

From an earlier generation, James was twenty-one years Santayana's senior and lived through a different America in his teens than did Santayana – that of the tumultuous civil war and its aftermath. Santayana acknowledges their differences on this matter, while writing about Dewey, who unlike James does represent the newly emerging nation: “He [James] was too spontaneous and rare a person to be a good mirror of any broad general movement; his Americanism, like that of Emerson, was his own and within him, and perhaps more representative of America in the past than in the future” (Dewey's *Naturalistic Metaphysics* 111).<sup>35</sup>

One important commonality was their extensive connection to Harvard. Santayana first got to know James as an undergraduate at Harvard, where he took courses with him. He went on to become a professor, at which time their relationship continued to evolve. Throughout their association, James consistently supported Santayana's professional ambitions and was influential in helping him achieve his first job and his professorship at the institution. They were on friendly terms personally; Santayana always sent him his latest works, and James often sent him copies of his articles.

Their writings, however, both public and private, when invoking the other, were oftentimes marked by an attempt to express on the one hand deep admiration and on the other extreme antipathy, and this unresolved tension remained a constant source of frustration for each throughout their professional lives, particularly remarkable in Santayana's case since he outlived James by over four decades. Both were aware of the philosophical and religious differences that divided them, but the deeper schism involved

---

<sup>35</sup> From Santayana's review of Dewey's book *Experience and Nature*, “Dewey's Naturalistic Metaphysics” in Lyon.

the nature and value of these fields. Overtly, they clashed as members of differing religious traditions, knowing that criticism in this area would not likely change either's orientation. By contrast, they debated epistemological issues involving realism and idealism, sometimes in the spirit that argument could perhaps sway the other's perspective on the matter.

Ambivalence of the deep kind that they experienced towards each other creates a difficulty: one can rarely take any statement of condemnation or praise in isolation, as definitive. Too often scholars find warmth or animosity, where they should more accurately detect a mixture of both. For example, James's enthusiastic recommendation on behalf of his student for the renewal of the Walker fellowship should not be taken as indicative of undiluted admiration for Santayana:

He is half-Spaniard, half-Yankee, and a genuine philosophic intelligence if ever there was one. He has the real dialectical zest, of playing with distinctions for the mere sweet fun of the thing, but is withal of a most serious turn – a Catholic in fact. A capital writer, both of prose and verse, good classic scholar, perfectly modest and simple character – I hardly know a more interesting young fellow, if you once get at him. But he cares nothing about showing off and is rather reserved. (Holzberger 37)

A more fit and succinct description of Santayana's vocation and character is scarcely conceivable. Yet, in the context of their overall exchanges, it becomes layered with nuanced meanings that must be sorted out in order to understand what this recommendation does and does not reveal about James and his later aversion to Santayana's work.

This recommendation, adduced by Holzberger as evidence of James's respect for Santayana, primarily reflects James in his role as ambassador of Harvard, one who

always promoted what he thought was in the institution's best interests. From this perspective, James's judgment in recommending Santayana, as an admired and gifted student who went on to become one of Harvard's greatest assets, exhibits both his commitment to pluralism in philosophy and his sense of fairness. An adequate evaluation of this letter also requires, however, that one not leave out of account that James was never sympathetic to Catholic culture or to the "philosophic intelligence," which he most often equated with idealism or rationalism. Furthermore, despite his erudition, he had a more limited interest in classical learning, at least when compared to Santayana's intense and personal pursuit of the subject. Santayana was eventually hired at Harvard in great part because his interests and intellectual pursuits placed him in a position to teach classes that others at the institution were not as well equipped to teach. Hence, his differences created advantages. The deep misgivings James will later express concerning Santayana's philosophy are, therefore, also already prefigured in James's carefully chosen words.

In *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*, a long, detailed study of James's philosophy as it pertains to his inchoate phenomenology, Charlene Haddock Seigfried devotes one fairly small paragraph to James's view of Santayana's philosophy: "James denies that Santayana's *Life of Reason* has any rational foundation. Like all philosophies, it reflects an individual perspective (TCW,II,399)." She then cites from the oft-quoted Miller letter written in 1905, in which James reacts to Santayana's *Life of Reason*: "He compliments Santayana's integrity in expressing his convictions and calls him 'Emerson's first rival and successor.' But then Emerson is called 'receptive, expansive, as if handling life through a wide funnel with a great indraught,'" Santayana,

in contrast, handles life “as if through a pinpoint orifice that emits his cooling spray outward over the universe like a nose-disinfectant from an ‘atomizer.’” Seigfried on the basis of this single statement concludes that “Such a metaphorical characterization of Santayana leaves no doubt that James finds ‘something profoundly alienating in his unsympathetic tone’” (225). Just as Holzberger interprets James’s recommendation letter as indicative of the high esteem in which James holds Santayana, Seigfried finds passages to justify dismissing Santayana as posing any relevance for a study of James. One might well ask, however, what exactly is unsympathetic about Santayana’s tone? With the exception of his admiration for Santayana’s writing style, basically, all of the characteristics that James praises in his letter of recommendation. Concerning the imagery of James’s letter, Levin adduces that “Santayana epitomized for James a style of thought, perhaps even of personal comportment, that kept the world at too safe a distance, oversanitizing its vital and sustaining messiness” (72). Interestingly, a repudiation of Seigfried’s one-sided account follows immediately in the same letter: “As he [Santayana] says of Schiller, whose beliefs he so largely reduplicates, ‘I *hate* him,’ so I, even though I should share Santayana’s beliefs (and do so in large measure), have to say ‘I *dislike* him.’”

In a rare moment of candor on this matter, James concedes that he has more in common with his former student than he is typically wont to admit. He concludes the Santayana portion of his letter with a realistic but fair assessment of how Santayana’s presence at Harvard impacts the institution: “I fear that the originality of the book will be lost on 19/20ths of the members of the philos. and Psychol. Assns!! The enemies of Harvard will find lots of blasphemous texts in him to injure us withal. But it is a great

feather in our cap to harbor such an absolutely free expresser of individual convictions” (11:111). James’s concern over Santayana being understood correctly is not unfounded, as he had run into a difficulty before from a prudish reviewer of *The Sense of Beauty* who requested that President Eliot not allow Santayana to teach at Harvard.<sup>36</sup> Significantly, he still considers Santayana to be primarily an asset, and James consistently promoted Santayana’s career at Harvard.

The predominantly ambivalent tone of their difficult relationship exhibits little change on either side as it unfolds through time. Like two nations with conflicting interests, each time they exchange ideas the same issues come up with never any significant progress to report afterwards. An important factor not often accorded sufficient weight: the historical record is one-sided because Santayana did not save his letters. Consequently, many of James’s critical statements addressed to Santayana are only known indirectly by the way Santayana or someone else responds to them. By contrast, James, well-established financially in America, saved all his letters. Consequently, history can listen in much more on Santayana’s voice than on James’s.<sup>37</sup>

## II. Pagan and Puritan Traditions in the Santayana / James Correspondence

According to Daniel Moreno in *Santayana Filósofo: La Filosofía como Forma de Vida*, Santayana may be understood more as a literary figure than a philosopher if considered from the perspective of the post-Kantian view in philosophy that

---

<sup>36</sup> The details are discussed in a footnote to James’s letter in defense of Santayana (8:315).

<sup>37</sup> The “Bibliographical Note” in *The Correspondence of William James* addresses issues pertaining to alterations to James’s correspondence, such as his wife’s having destroyed some letters because they reflected badly on her husband along with other historical vicissitudes (11:il-liii).

predominates in Europe today. It is rather the model of antiquity that serves to unequivocally brand Santayana as a philosopher: “It is the classical notion – better Hellenistic – of philosophy as a way of life with a message and heavy theoretical load” (20).<sup>38</sup> Because he does not fit neatly into the categories of contemporary philosophy, Moreno proposes to describe Santayana’s philosophy under the purposely paradoxical rubrics “ironic nihilist, Platonic materialist, and spiritual atheist” (23).

While acknowledging the pragmatic moment in Santayana’s philosophy, the Spaniard Moreno also questions whether Santayana should even be considered as an American philosopher, a view that finds some support in Santayana’s late summary of his philosophy, when Santayana defends himself against a critic who characterizes his philosophy as typical of the New World (*Apologia* 531). Of course, the opposite view also finds support from some of Santayana’s statements, and it is unlikely that he cared much either way about this issue. Moreno finds some support for his view on Santayana’s classicism in one of his early letters, but it is reflected in many others and it is interesting to keep his interpretation in mind while reading the correspondence as a whole, especially his exchanges with James, who early recognized the paradoxical nature of Santayana’s thinking, as that of a pagan in the modern world.

Psychologically, Santayana was far removed from the Puritan ethos, even while residing in its midst. From this perspective, his letters almost read like a small-scale *Bildungsroman* in which the young man gradually discovers how New England culture deviates from his precocious cultural expectations. It would have been difficult to

---

<sup>38</sup> “es la concepción classical – mejor helenística – de la filosofía como forma de vida con mensaje y fuerte carga teórica.”

imagine that Santayana had already come upon the major themes of his later philosophy in his early correspondence with James, if we lacked the concrete evidence to support the view. In 1887, Santayana writes from Germany to report his progress in his studies under the Walker fellowship, which he shares with Strong. He thinks that Strong will do well because he is highly goal-oriented – “This is rather an American trait, isn’t it? I’ve often noticed that my friends wanted to have an objective point, in their walks as well as their work, and I wondered how on that principle they reconciled themselves either with life or philosophy” (1:69-70). On account of this scholarship, Santayana feels pressure from James to produce something as evidence of his studies in Germany, but a few months later he writes James again: “I want more time and more experience to find where my real sympathies carry me” (1:89).

Apparently, James had also found it disheartening that Santayana had expressed some disappointment with his studies in philosophy, to which Santayana characteristically replies: “If philosophy were the attempt to solve a given problem, I should see reason to be discouraged about its success.” Santayana’s conception of philosophy differs, however, as he sees it as “rather an attempt to express a half-undiscovered reality, just as art is, and that two different renderings, if they are expressive, far from cancelling each other add to each other’s value. . . . But philosophy seems to me to be its own reward, and its justification lies in the delight and dignity of the art itself” (1:90). Moreno finds in this letter evidence of Santayana’s classicism (28), which arguably also corresponds to the traditional, philosophical habitus. Santayana rejects the technical philosophy of Germany, and is not discouraged by the finding that all previous philosophy has failed to achieve the status of established truth typical of

modern science and even wonders if, by such standards, he wasn't the last real philosopher (1:90).

The statements in this early letter already prefigure the phenomenological *Epoché* that "brackets" ideas, leaving out of consideration all connections to the physical world in order to explore the nature of these ideas as products of consciousness: "You interpret my disillusionments in the matter of philosophy rather too seriously. There is nothing tragic about them. I was drawn to philosophy in the beginning by curiosity and a natural taste for ingenious thinking and my attachment to philosophy remains as firm as ever."

Santayana leaves little doubt that he is targeting James's Protestant background, as he ends with: "These things never came to me as a personal problem, as a question of what is necessary for salvation" (1:97). The Catholic-minded Spaniard remained consistently aloof from the Puritan ethos that has so extensively determined American religious sensibility.

Santayana continues in the same vein, as he provides an account of philosophy that hints at the symbolic nature of knowledge, which he will later champion in his second book: "I see reason to think that they [differing philosophies] are conventional and hieroglyphic in the extreme. But the interest in these delineations is no more destroyed for me by not trusting their result . . . than the charm of a play . . . if it is not historical." Santayana concludes by making most explicit his emblematic identification between poetry and religion: "Philosophy does not cease to be a field of human activity and as such to have its significance and worth, and I cannot see why one so inclined by temperament cannot make good use of his time in that study, as in the study of art or comparative religion" (1:97). Written from Avila in 1888, this will be the last of their

correspondence for a few years, since Santayana returned to Harvard to continue his studies in the more structured Harvard environment, where proof of his work could be more easily produced.

As phenomenologists would do decades later, Santayana finds James's most interesting insights to be in *Principles*, as he recollects in a late essay: "The William James who had been my master was not this William James of the later years, whose pragmatism and pure empiricism and romantic metaphysics have made such a stir in the world" (A Brief History 14). He then goes on to praise "the genial author of *Principles of Psychology*" (15). This echoes similar statements in *Character and Opinion in the United States* written a decade earlier: "His popularity rests on three somewhat accidental books, *The Will to Believe*, *Pragmatism*, and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, whereas, as it seems to me, his best achievement is his *Principles of Psychology*" (74-75). This is James's least "accidental" book, for it attempts, however imperfectly, to systematically present the results of contemporary psychology, at a time when this field had not yet fully emancipated itself from philosophy.

Santayana's review of *Principles* is highly esteemed. In a recent introduction to the book, this review is recommended as "first-rate" and one that "deserves to be read by every student of *Principles*" (Evans xxxviii). James wrote Santayana an appreciative note: "I didn't say what I felt last night about your review, which I have read again carefully. It is a beautiful composition, and though I say it who should not (in view of the complimentary epithets which you lavish) it seems to me wonderfully *just*. It is a great honour to me, and I thank you most heartily" (147). But while approving of the strengths of *Principles*, Santayana remains skeptical of the way psychological issues are sometimes

treated from an excessively materialist (behaviorist) perspective and of how James fails to be impartial concerning moral matters: “One has but to turn from the discussion of space perception, for instance, to that of free will, automatism, or the nature of the soul, to mark the change. In regard to these matters Professor James is cautious, puzzled, and apologetic; and in making his final decision he is avowedly guided by his aesthetic and moral bias” (Dewey’s *Natural Metaphysics* 106). That the book represents a turn to materialism and a behaviorism in psychology became a commonplace criticism of it (*Principles* xxxviii).

After this review in 1892, the next extant historical document relevant for their relationship is the oft-quoted letter that James wrote to Palmer on April 02, 1900, at a time when James was already working on the Gifford lectures. As with other examples, this letter has been cited as evidence that James was both appreciative of Santayana’s work and that he was highly critical of it. Of course both are true.

The portion of the letter that addresses Santayana begins by praising *Interpretations*, “The great event in my life recently has been the reading of Santayana’s book” but chastising it for its putative antirealism: “Although I absolutely reject the platonism of it, I have literally squealed with delight at the imperturbable perfection with which the position is laid down on page after page; and grunted with delight at such a thickening up of our Harvard atmosphere.” As always, James valued diversity well before anyone at the academy, a genuine Jamesian characteristic that worked in Santayana’s favor.

As the earlier letters reveal, however, it seems disingenuous when James claims that “I now understand Santayana, the man. I never understood him before. But what a

perfection of rottenness in a philosophy! I don't think I ever knew the anti-realistic view to be propounded with so impudently superior an air." Santayana most likely took this statement in the worse way, and perhaps with good reason. Not only does James make this criticism to someone else then request it be forwarded to Santayana, but he uses a morally charged term. "Rotten" sounds fairly inoffensive by contemporary standards, but in Spanish it expresses a tone of heavy moral condemnation. Bilingual people can easily transfer a word's connotative meaning from one language to the other without ever realizing that they are doing so, since connotation is not always an explicit aspect of a definition, but one that is acquired through use.

Whether Santayana's bilingualism was a factor or not, it is likely that the word did carry a greater tone of moral condemnation than it might today, especially given Harvard's highly charged moral climate, where the greatest objections against Santayana were consistently leveled against his eccentric personality. Evidence that he was perturbed by this statement comes from the fact that it is one of the few direct quotes, the only one from the letters, which he uses from James, notably in one of the final essays that he published.<sup>39</sup> It is only in this essay, written over four decades after he left America, that Santayana attempts to settle accounts with James by acknowledging just how much he does borrow from James's thinking.

James finds it "refreshing to see a representative of moribund Latinity rise up and administer such reproof to us barbarians in the hour of our triumph." And, imagines "Santayana's style to be entirely spontaneous," even while it borrows a great deal from

---

<sup>39</sup> In "Apologia," discussed below.

the style of earlier works, including Hume and Renan. But, James objects to the relativism of Santayana's philosophy: "Nevertheless, how fantastic a philosophy! As if the "world of values" were independent of existence. It is only as being, that one thing is better than another. The idea of darkness is as good as that of light, as idea. There is more value in light's being." James's here reacts to Santayana's character as well as his philosophy: "And the exquisite consolation, when you have ascertained the badness of all fact, in knowing that badness is inferior to goodness, to the end. It only rubs the pessimism in. A man whose eggs at breakfast turn out always bad, says to himself, well, bad and good are not the same, anyhow" (9:179). It is interesting that, while mentioning others, James clearly alludes to the influence of Schopenhauer on Santayana and what he takes to be its anti-realistic bias, as still representing a form of idealism. The term "idea" represents the earlier translation of the German *Vorstellung*, which has since been more accurately rendered by "representation."<sup>40</sup>

James felt that he was firmly in the realist, anti-idealist camp by his emphasis on experience: "Moreover, when you come down to the facts, what do your harmonious and integral ideal systems prove to be? in the concrete? Always things burst by the growing content of experience. Dramatic unities; Laws of versification; ecclesiastical systems; scholastic doctrines. Bah!" The letter concludes by expressing James's sentiment that "The barbarians are in the line of mental growth, and those who do insist that the ideal and the real are dynamically continuous are those by whom the world is to be saved." James is "delighted that the other view, always existing" has "found so splendidly

---

<sup>40</sup> Moreno makes this point and discusses the influence of Schopenhauer on Santayana and how the latter modified the insights he found in Schopenhauer to fit his own thinking (52-54).

impertinent an expression among ourselves” and concludes by requesting that the letter be forwarded to Santayana since “it has the advantage of being more free-spoken and direct” (9:180). If anything, it is James’s longstanding, personal familiarity with Santayana that is at play here, as he obviously has in mind Santayana’s Catholicism (as the other view) as well as his well-known interest in Schopenhauer’s views.

Santayana provided a letter of his own in response. He basically objected to James’s eggs analysis by pointing out that he agreed with his objections, but only had a problem with the notion that “all eggs indiscriminately are good because the hen has laid them,” which reflect his ambivalence toward pragmatism as justifying all views just because they represent someone’s ideal. It will be recalled that Santayana objects to the “soft” in pragmatism, allying himself with Spinoza on this point.

His most irate responses, however, were directed to James’s claims about religion. Santayana complains about James’s Protestantism: “I wonder if you realize the years of suppressed irritation which I have past in the midst of an unintelligible sanctimonious and often disingenuous Protestantism, which is thoroughly alien and repulsive to me, and the need I have of joining hands with something far away from it and far above it” (1:212). He concludes by pointing out that when Ancient Greece became moribund “it transmitted to the rest of the world the seeds of its own rationality,” and that Americans needed to learn from the vanquished in the same way: “Otherwise they will be its physical masters only, and the Muses will fly over them to alight among some future face that may understand the gods better” (213).

Visiting Europe four years later, Santayana thanks James for sending him two new articles that he has published, “Does Consciousness Exist?” and “A World of Pure

Experience.” Difficult to ignore the closeness between the two thinkers, and how much each tried to move beyond their differences, since Santayana would surely be back at Harvard soon enough. Santayana is beyond cordial in this letter: “Your articles – apart from their intrinsic importance – have interested me particularly on account of a certain harmony which there is between what you make for and what I have fallen into myself.” This experience of “harmony” with James is not new to Santayana, as he further confesses that: “Doubtless you have from of old let seeds fall into my mind which have sprouted there into what I feel to be quite native convictions; and it comes to me now as a rather surprising happiness that I can invoke your authority in support of a great deal that I feared might seem rash in my opinions” (1:280). Noting James’s similarity with the existentialist Bergson, Santayana emphasizes that both make philosophical statements that encourage thought because they can be taken in different ways.

Continuing their ongoing philosophical discussion, he asks James for a clarification of his version of realism, a topic that he addresses in terms of a candle burning, and probes how one may understand the experience at different moments of the process. For the panpsychist, Santayana argues, no one could ever know the candle has ever been 8 inches long and then reduced to less gradually, for each of the different states of the candle are represented by different mental states that can never be utterly confirmed to exist in the object itself. But, for realists, such as James and himself, the object does exist and has actually possessed such and such qualities at different times.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> James had used the candle example along with a babe’s reaction to it as a central example in *Principles*. Santayana rightly equates James’s panpsychism with idealism, the very antithesis of realism.

Santayana's analysis in this letter is philosophical, but clearly understandable to James. He could have welcomed the criticism and replied to it. Instead, he exclaims, "I am very glad you find some of my ideas so congruent with yours. Yours are still one of the secrets of the universe which it is one of my chief motives to live for the unveiling of" (10:544). James claims to find Santayana's letter "too short and pregnant" for him to know with certainty what he means by his "candle realism," using this as pretext to not enter into a discussion on the matter: "So I won't enter into the discussion at present, but hang your letter up." As usual, James is careful to keep a safe distance from Santayana. Ironically, over the long haul it is Santayana who wins the title of realist, along with Russell, but only to be eclipsed by the stronger currents of non-realist philosophies, which find greater acceptance in the current philosophical milieu.

On a lighter, but telling note, James discusses lectures that he and Santayana are each planning to deliver at the Sorbonne, suggesting he may go the year after Santayana, "You the Baptist! I the Messiah!!" (545). Ever the rhetorician, James adds the humorous footnote, "That's the way it looks to my wife" (545)! With characteristic irony, Santayana seizes on the comment, "Why didn't the Messiah come this year and leave me the more congenial task of being a Paul to him and reducing his doctrine to dead dogmas and metaphysical Hellenisms?" (1:299). Leave it to Santayana to have conjured up such a "pregnant" response for James, who had just accused him of having done exactly that in his previous letter, for here Santayana sneakily puts the more accurate words in the James's mouth, whose view of Santayana was that he reduced the flux of reality to dead, listless categories of the mind. Shrewdly, Santayana also uses the comment as an opening to characterizing the letter as a whole as amusing, implying that James's claims

of not being able to comprehend him were feigned (1:299), as he also points out that his five volume work cannot be the basis of his lecture on account of it being “too concise!” – an obvious ironic retort to the charge of having written a very pregnant letter to James. If anything, Santayana’s style tends to err on the side of effusiveness, rather than that of conciseness.

After this letter, however, James and Santayana met in Athens and talked in person, where apparently James repeated his usual complaint that Santayana remained “a mystery” to him (Santayana 1:316). When Santayana wrote back, he was reacting to this conversation and possibly to *Will to Believe*, and his response constitutes an interesting and revealing moment of their correspondence: “It is perfectly clear that opinions are not all equally good on pragmatic principles, since some fulfill their pledges with advancing experience while others do not. . . . you would meet with less misapprehension and hostility on this score if you have out, in dogmatic form, how you conceive ‘the final system of reality’” (1:316).

One may reasonably ask, is this not what Santayana himself attempts to do in his *Realms of Being*? Concerning this system he imagines that James would say that it is historical, with feelings as substance “which may or may not be appropriated by persons.” One must still, however, “work out a physics of these feelings, and to show how propositions might be essentially true or false descriptions of this historical flux” (1:316). This sounds more like a very summary outline of Santayana’s philosophical project. To the degree that Santayana is a pragmatist, he remains uncomfortably close to becoming a St. Paul to his messiah, James.

Santayana's career as a Harvard professor was made possible by *Life of Reason*. The five-volume work was published between 1905 and 1906, and created a new opportunity for an exchange of ideas with James. By this time they had moved well beyond the overly volatile atmosphere created by James's response to Santayana's earlier publication. Five years earlier (in his response to the Palmer letter), Santayana had predicted that James would not like this book either. This time James reacted in a letter directly addressed to Santayana, who reciprocated by writing a letter that is more analytical and cordial: "You are very generous; I feel that you want to give me credit for everything good that can possibly be found in my book." Santayana consistently maintains that James misses what is most important in his philosophy: "you don't yet see my philosophy nor my temper from the inside; your praise, like your blame touches only the periphery, accidental aspects presented to this or that preconceived and disparate interest. The style is good, the tone is supercilious, here is a shrewd passage, etc, etc" (1:331).

What James seems to miss about Emerson, Santayana insists, is that reserving the name of religion for the personal leads to ignoring "the passionate insanities and political disasters which religion, for instance, has so often been another name for . . . He could give that name to his last personal intuition, and ignore what it stands for and what it expresses in the world" (1:331). Emerson is sensitive, "Hamlet-like," while Santayana sees himself as "a Latin," for whom "nothing seems serious . . . except politics . . . [and] the sort of men that your ideas will involve and the sort of happiness they will be capable of" (1:330). If the term *habitus* was not in their vocabulary, the idea behind it was a part of their *Weltanschauung*, and it is mostly what they fought over, differences in what

James termed “sentiment of rationality.” Santayana’s criticism of Emerson also indirectly targets James’s approach in *Varieties*, which privileges experience at the expense of social reality.

This letter may well be Santayana’s most revealing in that he discusses openly his view of the past. He does not bemoan the loss of the Greek gods or the diminishing importance of Gothic cathedrals, but the loss of the ideals these represented: “It is that vision of perfection that we just catch, or for a moment embody in some work of art, or in some idealised reality: it is the concomitant inspiration of life, always various, always beautiful, hardly ever expressible in its fullness” (1:331-32). Santayana tells James that he was more passionate about these things than he usually let on and hopes that readers of *Life* will not miss the “Sunt lachrimae rerum, ad mentem mortalia tangunt” that permeates the work (1:331). The quotation is not direct, but adapted from Virgil.

Although we could wish we had more of these letters to better assess the matter, by the time Santayana’s third book was published, it does appear that he wished to be closer to James. He ends his letter with: “I seldom write anyone so frankly as I have here. But I know you are human, and tolerant to anything, however alien, that smells of blood” (1:332). Nietzsche claims that he writes in blood, and this hints at the existential aspect of James’s philosophy. Clearly Santayana knew James’s biases and in these last few letters he may have been looking for friendlier terms, while for James the “I dislike him” remained firm as ever.

For Kuklick, James’s earlier gesture of hanging Santayana’s letter concerning his candle realism as a specimen to be studied later becomes emblematic of how Santayana was treated at Harvard: “In effect, Santayana was a good example for the students of the

accuracy of the Harvard analysis of what would happen to one without religion. If you don't believe us, the philosophers almost seemed to say, just look at Santayana" (366). Religion at Harvard was synonymous with the kind of Protestantism that Santayana rejected, and Kuklick's statement sheds light on James as well, for his career would not have flourished as it did, had he not embraced, however cautiously, the possibility of "something more," a transcendent deity whose plan our lives could conform to after all.

### III. Santayana's Final Retrospective on James

Critics have turned to his correspondence with James, to his autobiography, or to *Character and Opinion in the United States* in order to decipher how Santayana came to ultimately view James, but the most obvious source has too often been ignored. Scholars interested in any of the great philosophers could envy not having had at their disposal the great resource that is *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, an anthology from *The Living Philosophers* series that begins with an essay by the philosopher, "A General Confession," is followed by eighteen essays from different contributors examining diverse aspects of his work, and concludes with "Apologia Pro Mente Sua," in which Santayana replies to his critics.<sup>42</sup> The octogenarian was up to the task and undaunted by the mostly younger challengers' analyses, expositions, and criticisms. Responding to each in turn, he also managed to speak past them to an intellectual presence he had always found difficult to engage directly, that of William James.

---

<sup>42</sup> "A General Confession" is a three part essay, each of which was published earlier in different contexts and was modified and combined into one essay by Santayana for the anthology (Schilpp 3). It should also be noted that Santayana commented negatively in his letters on the quality of the criticisms he received, for example, at one point referring to the critics as "a set of half-educated children let loose" (6:411).

Out of twenty-seven references to James in the index twelve occur within the first thirty-one pages of Santayana's opening essay, two brief allusions are found in one other contributor, Charles Hartshorne, and one very telling one in Russell. The latter personally knew both men well and understood something about James's importance to Santayana, as he concludes his analysis with the *obiter dictum* that he had no doubt that James knew more about the good life than did Plato, although the latter could better describe it (473). The remainder of the references once again point the reader to Santayana (Apologia), as does the only discussion of pragmatism in the anthology, which is found in his opening essay, where he confesses to having been all along a sort of pragmatist himself. Was the significance Santayana now gives James ignored by the contributors because it was too obvious to need discussion, or too outside the frame of reference Santayana had enmeshed himself in to appear important?

Retracing the significant moments of his thinking leads him to an analysis of James's memorable verdict of his early philosophy in the Palmer letter: "What he hyperbolically called perfection was, I suppose, my way of spying the self-deceptive process, *la fonction fabulatrice*, of the inspired mind; what he called rottenness was my apparent assumption that in the direction of religion and morals imagination was all, and there was nothing objective" (499). After the publication of *Life*, Santayana reports an encounter with James: "he stopped me one day in the street, aglow with encouragement such as athletic English dons shout to their pupils in a race." Santayana found his characterization of his latest book "hardly recognizable . . . turning it into a sort of Bergsonian vision of a miraculous human evolution." When Santayana objected and explained why this was mistaken, James concluded that Santayana was a scholastic: "I

pleaded guilty to the horrid charge. Hadn't James himself declared that Scholasticism was nothing but common sense carried out consistently?" (499).

The now older Santayana, however, can be explicit about his attachments in a way that the younger found more difficult to do, living as he was in a cultural environment that was inimical to both his background and his temperament. In *Apologia*, he explicitly proclaims his attachment to Platonism and Catholicism: "It was a philosophical appreciation, not an accidental prejudice of birth or education, as belief in such objects would probably have been. I saw, or thought I saw, *why* those ideas had been formed and cherished, and *what function* they exercised in moral life" (497). Yet, this is not a straightforward or easy position to unambiguously state, and one can easily see, at least early on, James's point: "He felt that I was detached; and he may well have had a shrewd medical suspicion to the effect that detachment is likely to spring from some suppressed attachment, and that if the real world displeased me, I must be in love with some false world" (499). Still, the fundamental question remains: Santayana remains critical of James even at this late stage of his thinking – "The judgments of William James were indeed impulsive, and his descriptions impressionistic, based on a penetrating but casual spurt of sympathy or antipathy" (499) –, so what is the common element that keeps Santayana coming back to him?

Conceivably, a criticism that he levels against his critics applies in some sense to Santayana himself:

. . . perhaps views that in some ancient author would have seemed merely commonplaces or antiquated are resented in me, because these critics had found other things in my books that sounded modern, and that they had innocently appropriated as if compatible with their own principles; so that

now they attribute to incoherence or to treasons in me what is due to an old misapprehension of theirs. (Apologia 538)

If Santayana early on in his dealings with James manages an uncomfortable détente with him – uncomfortable, primarily because James preferred to see greater distance between them than Santayana initially saw –, with his writings on religion and pragmatism, James had moved in an apparently new and initially surprising direction, one that must have made Santayana question whether he ever quite understood him. Perhaps he simply misappropriated from James only what he had found congenial. Put differently, James’s incoherence, as Gale notes, was already strongly prefigured in *Principles*, and Santayana may have appropriated from this work only what he felt “to be quite native convictions,” seeing as only incidental the many ways in which their positions differed.

#### IV. Disagreements over Phenomenology and Existentialism

A significant difference between philosophy and science is that the latter has been able to develop a dominant methodology since the Renaissance and Enlightenment, when its basic norms were definitively established. Since then, consensus on issues of methodology has become further solidified. Philosophy, in contrast, continues to suffer from an identity crisis, and as Husserl liked to stress, seems to begin anew with each philosopher beginning from the most elementary level and never achieving any lasting unity. Anyone who doubts this needs only compare the uniformity with which science is pursued in both Europe and the English-speaking world with how differently philosophy looks from each side of the Atlantic. In the English speaking-world, philosophy has adopted assumptions that attempt to homogenize philosophy with science (scientific

philosophy), excluding any approach that does not conform to the methodology of the sciences. At the time when this trend was beginning at Harvard, however, European philosophy was heading in the opposite direction with the movements of existentialism and phenomenology.

A brief comparison between such extensively variegated philosophical movements as phenomenology and existentialism must of necessity be selective; the characteristics chosen from each will be only the most relevant for a better understanding of the issues that divided James and Santayana, since both had a very definite connection to phenomenology, particularly during its earliest, Husserlian phase, as well as an awareness of the existentialist ethos that began to find a most explicit expression around this time.

From the perspective of intellectual history, especially during the period in question, phenomenology and existentialism are best viewed as independent philosophical movements, for each evolves as different kinds of reactions to disparate historical circumstances in Europe. These movements have impacted American philosophy in very limited ways. For decades now, the latter has followed the tenets of analytic philosophy, Reichenbach's scientific philosophy, deeming the "continentalists," who challenge the centrality of scientific methodology for doing philosophy, to be mostly irrelevant for serious philosophical work. Perhaps partially as a reaction to this tendency in the English-speaking world, many after Heidegger have followed his lead and argued that phenomenology and existentialism simply focus on different aspects of reality, and that it remains compatible to consider them together as a single philosophical

movement: existential-phenomenology. Europe's response to America's scientific philosophy generates its own, unique brand of rational reconstruction.

Steven Crowell implicitly follows this tradition by arguing that existentialism “may be defined as the philosophical theory which holds that a further set of categories [than those of traditional philosophy], governed by the norm of authenticity, is necessary to grasp human existence.”<sup>43</sup> Crowell in passing lists many of the features that his method will deem irrelevant for defining the movement: “To approach existentialism in this categorial way may seem to conceal what is often taken to be its ‘heart’ . . . namely, its character as a gesture of protest against academic philosophy, its anti-system sensibility, its flight from the ‘iron cage’ of reason.” This older understanding alluded to other important characteristics that Crowell will relegate to the trash heap of history: “that the major existential philosophers wrote with a passion and urgency rather uncommon in our own time, and . . . [that] the idea that philosophy cannot be practiced in the disinterested manner of an objective science is indeed central to existentialism.” It is difficult to think of existentialism without foregrounding these traits.

His justification for excluding all of these admittedly valid characteristics of the movement is “that all the themes popularly associated with existentialism – dread, boredom, alienation, the absurd, freedom, commitment, nothingness, and so on – find their philosophical significance in the context of the search for a new categorial framework, together with its governing norm.” This kind of analysis represents a rational reconstruction (the pun being accidental, but apropos) of existentialism that makes it

---

<sup>43</sup> Taken from his article “Existentialism” from the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

more respectable in modern academic circles, but irrelevant for the relationship between Santayana and James; hence, I will follow the older, traditional model that Crowell dispels.

Logically compatible as existentialism and phenomenology have been argued to be, they remain distinct, and more importantly, appeal to different and antithetical character types. One need only consider the differences between Kierkegaard and Husserl to see the point: the latter wrote books on logic and was comfortable as a professional academic “Husserl was the anti-modernist par excellence among modern philosophers; he was a passionate exponent of classical rationalism, whose single and exalted aim was to ground the rationality of man upon a more adequate and comprehensive basis than the past had achieved” (Barrett 12). Kierkegaard, in contrast, lived the life of a recluse and wrote about “fear and trembling before God,” and other kinds of experiences that existentialists deem unavailable to the conceptual analysis typical of traditional philosophy. He was a complex human being who also suffered from physical deformity. Still, he “has been criticized as being overmelancholy, excessively introverted, even morbid – a Hamlet more brooding than the original Dane” (Barrett 155).

As a historical reconstruction, contemporary definitions of existential-phenomenology change the character of each: if existentialism may lose its “heart” in the process, phenomenology drastically changes its methodology, by rejecting Husserl’s *Epoche* (bracketing), for instance. Consequently, examining these movements from the perspective of the most current perspective becomes ineffectively presentist inasmuch as it works against the goal of accurately reflecting the context in which those important ideas first developed.

Existentialism in Kierkegaard is intimately related to a religious perspective that emphasizes that real choice cannot follow from a definite criterion. This notion is derived from Abraham in the Bible, who found himself with no rational way to decide how to proceed in the case of the sacrifice of his son. Phenomenology as envisioned by Husserl, in contrast, brackets the existence of an external world in order to better describe the phenomenal world of essences as they appear to consciousness. In spirit, existentialism, conceived beyond the search for any particular category or norm, runs counter to classicism in its rejection of reason while Husserlian phenomenology aspires to develop a classically oriented, rational philosophy and espouses a reflective, contemplative attitude modeled on that of Greek philosophy. The one explores exceptional states of mind that involve individuality, passion and emotion, while the other relies on a general analysis of consciousness, in keeping with a carefully worked out – if not always agreed upon – methodology.

As late as 1965, Quentin Lauer will still maintain that existentialism is incompatible with phenomenology: “Though ‘existentialism’ may have been influenced by Husserl’s phenomenology (as is frequently uncritically asserted), the latter remains a radical ‘essentialism.’ It has no concern for the individual, the unique, precisely because it could not do so and still be ‘scientific’” (117 fn 57). The difference here parallels that between the earlier version of Hellenic humanism, and the later Hellenistic variety. Protagoras’ famous, “Man is the measure of all things,” as characteristic of the earlier period could become descriptive of features such as the entasis of the *Parthenon*, that remain true (i.e., have the same effect) for all human observers, while the later period came closer to the emotional ethos of existentialism in attempting to capture individual

suffering, as do the melodramatic friezes of *Zeus' Altar* at Pergamon.<sup>44</sup> Thus, existentialism exhibits “a concern on the intersubjective level with the individual subject, but for Husserl this concern is scarcely ‘existential’” (Lauer 117 fn 57).<sup>45</sup>

Several book-length studies have endeavored to elucidate James’s phenomenology, and if they have not succeeded in changing the general consensus that James is primarily a pragmatist, they have opened up the discussion to the possibility that James’s thinking cannot be so readily subsumed under a single rubric. A striking area of agreement between phenomenological interpreters of James is that *Principles* remains his most important book for understanding his contribution to phenomenology. John Wild in *The Radical Empiricism of William James* makes clear the connection between the phenomenological movement and James’s philosophy: “Ever since I met Edmund Husserl personally in 1931 and studied with Heidegger . . . , I have been deeply interested in phenomenology and existential philosophy. The former is concerned with the clarification of patterns, and the latter with human existence as we live it through.” Thinking that these represented a uniquely European phenomenon, Wild “first heard of Husserl’s intensive reading of James’ *Principles of Psychology* soon after it was published in 1890,” and read Gordon Allport’s statement that had this book been “properly understood, [it] might have inaugurated a native phenomenological movement in the United States” (vii).

In *William James and Phenomenology*, James M. Edie acknowledges that though he is familiar with James’s entire corpus, only *Principles* and *Varieties* still interests him,

---

<sup>44</sup> Flemming, 62.

<sup>45</sup> William Fleming in *Arts and Ideas* describes the difference between the Hellenic and Hellenistic partially in these terms, in the chapters “Hellenic Style” and “Hellenistic Style.”

“the first for its theory of knowledge and the second because it is the first and really the only phenomenology of religious experience to have been written up to now, a subject in which Husserl himself was uninterested” (vii). The emphasis clearly remains on *Principles*, since its putative theory of knowledge would be phenomenological, creating the basis for the later, phenomenological description of religion. Lastly, Bruce Wilshire, in *William James and Phenomenology: A Study of ‘The Principles of Psychology,’* dismisses the notion that as a psychologist James should be considered a “functionalist,” since the mind cannot be reduced, for James, to brain functioning: “Moreover it must be added that James’s conception of mentalistic terms is very different from that of an introspectionist. He is neither a pure functionalist, nor an introspectionist, nor a behaviorist; if he is any single thing, he is a pioneering phenomenologist” (7).

In *William James’s Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*, Charlene Haddock Seigfried places “phenomenological James” in the more realistic perspective of a rational reconstruction that does not overstate this aspect of his thinking. She emphasizes that the once popular assumption that James was primarily a pragmatist has been successfully challenged “by those interested in his influence on the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.” The problem, however, is that “these writers presuppose a Husserlian model of phenomenology and investigate James’s writings (usually restricted to *Principles*) insofar as they anticipate or fail to sufficiently develop the ‘proper’ phenomenological model.” Seigfried consciously aims to avoid a presentist approach to the study of the phenomenological strain in James’s philosophy: “Rather than looking over my shoulder to see how it measures up to later models of phenomenology, I am concerned to recover its original formulation and develop it further so that its strengths and weaknesses as an

historically earlier and alternative phenomenological paradigm can become available for contemporary assessment” (76).

An important feature of James’s inchoate phenomenology worthy of mention is that he “tied the success of his project to the possibility of describing, without any presuppositions, the pre-reflective moment of experience” (76). Presuppositionlessness represents the stricture to describe appearances as such, with no reference to any particular view – scientific, common sensical, metaphysical, or otherwise – of how we experience reality or the external world is putatively structured or constructed. To this, one may add Husserl’s “phenomenological reduction,” which involves carefully attending to consciousness in order to arrive at the pre-reflective moment of consciously experienced reality, one that avoids unnecessary and unwarranted assumption about the nature of what we experience. Santayana encapsulates this insight in his notion of animal faith.

Existentialism, as an independent movement, has been even less popular in American philosophy departments than phenomenology. In literature departments it has received greater attention. In *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy*, William Barrett became an early proponent of the idea that James might best be seen as an existentialist rather than a pragmatist: “Pragmatists nowadays acknowledge James’s genius but are embarrassed by his extremes: by the unashamedly personal tone of his philosophizing, his willingness to give psychology the final voice over logic where the two seem to conflict, and his belief in the revelatory value of religious experience.” But it is James’s tirades against abstraction that most clearly place him within the bounds of this movement: “There are pages in James that could have been written by Kierkegaard, and

the Epilogue to *Varieties of Religious Experience* puts the case for the primacy of personal experience over abstraction” (18-19).

Barrett’s claims have been taken up by the very authors who set out to analyze James’s pioneering use of the phenomenological method. Interestingly, each must also acknowledge the incompatibility of James’s existentialism with the Husserlian type of phenomenology that they ascribe to James. Seigfried notes that in *The Will to Believe*, a chapter entitled “The Importance of Individuals,” James relies on an existential argument that “the differences between great individuals like Aristotle, Goethe, Napoleon, and the average person . . . is as deserving of philosophical investigation as is what accounts for the average behavior which is usually taken as the proper subject matter of sociology” (112). Edie adds that: “Like the existentialists Sartre, Malraux, Camus, and Dostoevski – and unlike traditional British moralists – James turns to the extreme cases for their illustrative value. This turn is essential to his method” (55). Its reliance on extreme values made *Varieties* much more existential at its core than phenomenological, which explains Santayana’s condemnation of the work.

Wilshire provides the most extensive account of the existentialist aspects of James’s philosophy. He highlights James’s adoption of Kierkegaard’s aphorism “We live forwards but understand backward,” which means that “If consciousness is not completely reflectable, then the active interest and concern which is in functional relationship to what things are would not be completely reflectable either.” This observation leads to the conclusion that “they [things] are not completely knowable at any point in time,” which “grates harshly against the whole rationalist tradition from Plato down through Husserl” (199).

This link between phenomenology and the history of philosophy encapsulates an important difference between Santayana and James. While James had little patience with traditional philosophy, Santayana felt attached to it by his love of Plato, Lucretius, and Spinoza, among others (Ashmore 99). Santayana may have gestured toward existentialism when he espouses “an irrationalist doctrine of matter” (Woodward 18), but he still hopes to remain linked to traditional philosophy in ways that are incompatible with contemporary philosophy, whether analytic or existentialist.

Another feature that Wilshire sees as part of James’s existentialism is his validation of states of mind that cannot be clearly defined. Wilshire finds James to be an exception in Western thought for his acceptance of vagueness as an unavoidable constituent of our lives: “we must not distort this vagueness through secondary reflections which ‘clarify’ it all. At every waking moment of our lives there is a margin of things known vaguely.” James wants not the abstractions of science and philosophy, but “to grasp the environment in which we actually live – that which shades off on all sides into the dense, opaque, and vague; that which lies in the corner of the eye” (199-200). Like the phenomenologists that come later, both Santayana and Henry James will accept this irreducible vagueness in the nature of experience, but with a significantly different emphasis, one more clearly in keeping with the classical proclivity for the primacy of reason and understanding.

James explicitly adopted what amounts to an existentialist position from his reading of Bergson. Hilary Putnam notes that James shared three beliefs with Bergson.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> In *The Correspondence of William James*, Vol. 10, “Introduction.”

First, that experience, most broadly conceived (i.e., beyond the limits that traditional empiricists had placed on it) corresponds to reality. Secondly, that this fundamental reality cannot be reduced to concepts, and finally “that in some way concepts actually *falsify* the character of unconceptualized experience, which means that all our concepts falsify, and *must* falsify, the ways (note the plural!) that reality most fundamentally is” (10:xxx). Hence, consciousness shapes an independently existing reality that cannot be fully cognized. Like James, Bergson has also been deemed to be a yet to be discovered existentialist (Barrett 15).

Although Wilshire does not explicitly express it in these terms, it is James’s existentialism that gets in the way of his phenomenology.<sup>47</sup> James remains an inconsistent phenomenologist in *Varieties* because he cannot remain true to “the omnipresence of cognition – the view that thought is already about an Object, whether a real reference in the world is to be found or not for the topic which the Object may contain.” The cause of this dilemma is that “James did not bring the internality of the cognitive relation to a decisive and clear awareness” (205). Using terms that James adopts in *Principles* and after, James cannot choose between characterizing experience as “flat” or as “having a point.” If it is flat, then it merely goes from one experience to the next “much like a contingent set of events” (204). If it terminates in a particular object as a supposed terminus of its meaning, then it ends in solipsism, for there is no way to definitively establish any connection between experience and reality (205). The phenomenological solution would be to make the object internal to the act of cognition.

---

<sup>47</sup> This is not to imply that there can’t be other factors that also impede James from having developed such a philosophy.

Phenomenology accomplishes this through intentionality, a philosophical concept with a long history that begins with Aristotle (Wilshire 155-62). For Husserl, it becomes the notion that all mental acts are about something. The object may or may not be physically existent – the two, the physical and the mental, being independent of each other, so that the meaning is really to be found in the mental disposition toward the object. Wild, following James's early critique of the unconscious, uses falling in love to illustrate the concept (26). One may at first simply like someone, then, in time, come to see the person in a new light, as an object of love. This does not mean that one unconsciously loved the person all along, nor is the person now physically different. What has changed is the mental disposition toward the person. Arguably two different objects are involved: one the object of liking, the other the object of love – this is what is meant by the intentional object –, for once one does fall in love, one has come to see something one did not see before, even if the person (the external object) remains the same.

The latter solution, however, would have likely struck James as too idealistic to be maintained consistently, and in any case Kierkegaardian existentialism was too deeply rooted in his character. James's existential attitude is ultimately of the Puritan variety that retreats to suffering whenever the world fails to live up to our most cherished expectations. Richardson cites John Jay Chapman, who thought that despite his “playfulness,” James had “a deep sadness about” him. “You felt that he had just stepped out of this sadness in order to meet you and was to go back into it the moment you left him,” Richardson adds that “The many photographs of James bear this out. He is almost never smiling, almost always serious, with traces of care about the eyes” (236).

Furthermore, “He was nervous, mercurial, taut, and edgy; his indecisiveness drove friends and relations to distraction” (237). Both his home and education “fed his restlessness.” Approvingly, he cites Santayana’s characterization that James had never achieved ““that reposeful mastery of particular authors and those safe ways of feeling and judging which are fostered in great schools and universities’.” Richardson also emphasizes how earlier American writers according to Van Wyck Brooks, “had three things in common: family roots in the American Revolution, a classical education, and a connection with the land. William James lacked all three. He had roots in commerce, a hit-or-miss early education followed by a narrowly scientific later one . . .” Consequently, James remains “a rebel, an outsider,” who juxtaposes “a strong intellectual claim for order with a social taste for chaos” (238).

Anthony Woodward in *Living in the Eternal: a Study of George Santayana* provides the best approach for exploring the connection between Santayana’s thought and his personal experiences because he develops an interpretation that avoids the usual clichés about Santayana’s pragmatism, and rather emphasizes how his ideas evolve with respect to a European context, particularly existentialism and phenomenology. Explicitly, he rejects neo-pragmatist appropriations of Santayana. Rather than argue that Santayana essentially represents a position that is to be best characterized as pragmatic, phenomenological, or under any other single philosophical rubric, Woodward acknowledges that “Santayana remains unassimilable” (64). He could, however, be “nudged” in either of these directions, since he expresses ideas that come close to each. James contrasts with Santayana in being even more malleable, often writing in sympathy with pragmatism, phenomenology, existentialism, and almost any ism that came his way.

Woodward explains W.H. Auden's negative criticisms of Santayana's *My Host the World* by noting the former's existentialism and Santayana's animadversion to this mode of philosophizing: "It is significant that the whole existentialist furor which sprang up after the Second World War was fundamentally incomprehensible to Santayana." Yet, Santayana could theoretically have endorsed it: "The stress on 'the Absurd' and the contingent in certain latter-day existentialists could conceivably have found an echo in Santayana's irrationalist doctrine of matter; he certainly read Shestov in the 1930s with some enthusiasm." Santayana's whole point in developing his philosophy of matter, however, was that we needed to understand this realm of being in order to develop rational ways to live with its vicissitudes – and, *how* else could humans survive? Hence, "Santayana's attitude toward Existentialism after the Second World War suggests that he found most of its outlook perverse. If you insist on taking your personal fortunes as the centre of the universe, and your contingent choices as of cosmic import, naturally you will be in a state of *Angst*. Why do so?" (18). Woodward perfectly captures Santayana's general response to the existentialist dilemma.

How these philosophical movements relate to deeply rooted character traits of each philosopher requires a qualified rational reconstruction, inasmuch as they did not explicitly express their differences in these philosophical terms. This, however, does not do any more violence to their respective philosophies than does a purely pragmatic interpretation. If anything, seeing the different philosophical strands of their times interwoven through different aspects of their relationship enriches the nature of their debates.

In one of the most instructive brief introductions to Santayana, Richard Colton Lyon argues that it is his uprooted personality that allows Santayana to make such important observations about America: “Santayana’s strength” consists in that “his sense of the past yielded ideas of order which made definite his sense of the possible.” Lyon connects Santayana to “those two other spiritually deracinated Americans, Henry James and Henry Adams. By the fineness of their sympathy with the alien and the remote all three enlarge our sense of the possibilities open to mind and even, perhaps, to society” (xiv). Santayana remains unassimilated because he ultimately opted to remain alienated from all cultures, all societies; and this enables him to achieve a uniquely critical stance.

One may profit from reading Santayana in this fashion, as may “perhaps” our present age, as long as one remains clear that such a reading does not exhaustively represent Santayana’s goal in doing philosophy or even express his purpose in criticizing the dominant cultural trends of America. Santayana’s detachment is extensive and genuine enough to exclude even the concern for changing anyone’s mind about anything. Whatever his intent may have been, Santayana developed a sophisticated philosophy with a definite structure which can be entertained and used or further developed to further different ends than his own. A unique feature of Santayana (that he shares with Henry James) is the difficulty involved in separating the content of his thought from the style of his writing. Perhaps, that is not a surprising feature of a literary-minded philosopher, who did not write for the emerging philosophical establishment.

Another important achievement of Woodward’s interpretation is that he never loses sight of the ways in which Santayana remains “a traditional philosopher in setting himself up as a guide to the good life.” It is easy to lose sight of this because Santayana

does not follow the typical trends in this regard, as does say Russell. His belief that all knowledge is symbolic in nature does not reduce his commitment to the philosophical search for ultimate knowledge: “he retained, possibly from his early theological formation, a firm reverence for the absolute nature of truth as the totality of realised essences” (30). In keeping with this attitude, Santayana’s philosophy eschews existentialism, as this movement lies at the opposite pole from his religious sensibilities, something that Woodward highlights via a comparison between Santayana, Chekhov, and Kierkegaard (123-26).

Santayana’s sense of alienation, Woodward argues, is prefigured in his early childhood experiences, when his mother departed from Spain and he had to remain behind with his family: “The dry detachment of the aged Santayana gives added pungency to the narrating of a nightmarish time [in his autobiography, *Persons and Places*]. The family squabbled abominably. A young cousin lost her baby in great agony and died in the house they all inhabited at Avila.” His uncle, Santiago, “would ceaselessly walk around, half singing, and half moaning, always repeating the same sounds and crushing a piece of paper in his hand [.]” In Santayana’s own words, ““This crowded, strained, disunited and tragic family life remains for me the type of what life really is: something confused, hideous and useless”” (Woodward 67). In a spirit reminiscent of both Santayana and James, Woodward conjectures that these early experiences had a great impact on the course of Santayana’s thought throughout his life: “Such primary responses to existence – visceral, physiological, and consolidating themselves in the obscure certainties of an emotional disposition – probably have more

effect on the reasoned judgments of later life than many would be willing to consent” (68).

Woodward concludes that the kind of philosophical approach that Santayana comes closest to in this matter (if one “nudges” him) is that of phenomenology, as described by F.C. Coplestone. Santayana, essentially, exhorts readers to focus in on certain aspects of experience in order to induce them to view matters from his unique perspective. Argument in both Santayana and Wittgenstein function not as a way of proving anything, but to expand horizons, or help to dismiss unfeasible options: “whatever the shortcomings of Santayana’s philosophy, it has extraordinary rhetorical power – ‘force’ – in propounding a view of man’s situation in the world: a *Weltanschauung*” (64). Put differently, Santayana aims to energize certain perspectives that have come to seem ineffectual in our times on account of our loss of vision.

Woodward’s book on Santayana combined with Gale’s study of James’s philosophy and character, along with a great deal of other research during the past four decades (particularly on James), has helped to set the stage for a more complete understanding of the James-Santayana relationship than was possible previously. Santayana and James clashed over, not so much two different strands of pragmatism, as has sometimes been supposed, but over how philosophy should be pursued, and what persona or demeanor is most appropriate for a philosopher to adopt. This becomes most obvious to those who do not exclude the religious dimension of their thinking when examining their respective philosophical writings. If Woodward implies that Santayana rejects the Hebraic, Old Testament, and Pauline faith-based traditions, Gale emphasizes James’s enthusiastic pursuit of some of this tradition’s most central concerns: “By

making moral concerns central and all-consuming, James is squarely within the Hebraic tradition; Russell, within the Greek or Gnostic one. For the one, our ultimate goal is to do what is morally required of us; for the other, to be a detached knower” (151).

Santayana greatly admired Russell. He anonymously donated large sums of money to him at a time of need, referred to him affectionately as Bertie, and expressed enthusiastic anticipation at reading Russell’s critical summary of his philosophy for the Schillp anthology. Russell’s article was the last to arrive, and when it did, Santayana expressed appreciation for the kindness of Russell’s critical account. One has to wonder why Santayana felt such a deep sympathy with a Protestant, liberal philosopher, who extolled the values of logic for the field of philosophy, something that Santayana vehemently resisted. The best answer would seem to be that they both shared, in the words of James, a similar “sentiment of rationality”; one, however, that each expressed in diverging ways.

#### V. Husserl’s Concept of the Philosophical Habitus

The inability to contend with dissonant attitudes and ideas that Santayana and James could never fully and explicitly formulate to themselves or to each other created a lacuna in their understanding which prevented them from exploring the more cooperative intellectual relationship that their similar ideas on religious experience could have facilitated. The more one studies this dimension of their lives, the more pathos – bordering on the tragic – one will discover in statements, such as James’s “Can’t you [Santayana] and I, who in spite of such divergence have yet so much in common in our *Weltanschauung*, start a systematic movement at Harvard against the desiccating and

pedantifying process.”<sup>48</sup> For, both did share a mode of philosophizing that is American in tenor; one that, going back to Emerson, attempts to remain pertinent for the lives of everyday people, while struggling to attain a level of technicality that allows it to remain viable as an academic pursuit, without getting lost in the minutiae of later scientific philosophy.

Although the term *habitus* has been popularized in modern times by Pierre Bourdieu and his followers,<sup>49</sup> an elaboration of it that deeply influenced him, and that avoids some of its pitfalls, is to be found in the work of Husserl. Much as “One gets the feeling that Wittgenstein wrote his *Philosophical Investigations* with an open copy of *Principles of Psychology* before him” (Gale 165), in like fashion one may sense that Bourdieu did the same with Edmund Husserl’s “Philosophy as Rigorous Science.” Husserl’s similar use of notions that Bourdieu borrows and modifies, such as *habitus* and *doxa* only hints at the many points of contact between the two works.

In this early essay, Husserl sets out a program for future philosophical work in which the hope of almost all previous philosophers to achieve scientific rigor is placed at the center: “Philosophy’s constant failure to develop into a rigorous science might lead one to conclude that it is philosophy’s essence to be nonscientific and that it should abandon its misguided efforts to become scientific.<sup>50</sup> This is a conclusion, however, that Husserl refuses to accept” (Lauer 8). The German word *Wissenschaft* must be translated

---

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in McCormick, 86.

<sup>49</sup> See *The field of Cultural Production* and Johnson’s introduction of the work for a definition of some of Bourdieu’s terminology. Many of the terms are used similarly as Husserl’s earlier formulation.

<sup>50</sup> The essay was first published in 1910-11.

as science, but the German word does not necessarily connote empirical methods, but the idea of a critical evaluation of basic assumptions.

Obvious to Husserl is also that the radical task that he has in mind cannot be accomplished using the methodology of naturalism, or the empirical sciences as currently conceived, which is too limited in scope to address many human concerns. One aim of Husserl in this essay is to delineate the ideal characteristics of science, so that these could be used to achieve a “scientific” philosophy, keeping in mind that science must adapt its methods to fit the subject matter it is dealing with. Once such a rigorous approach were achieved, however, philosophy would encompass a single consistent perspective that would include a kind of necessity akin to that found in other sciences, one that excludes differing schools with opposing points of view, *anschauungen*, or *Weltanschauungen* – all of which imply one way of characterizing reality that those who do not subscribe to the particular set of ideals represented by one particular *Weltanschauung* may find objectionable from their own similarly structured, but limited *Weltanschauung*. Darwinian evolution does not belong to a mere *Weltanschauung* with a “point of view” within science, but constitutes what science reveals about the nature of life. It represents the truth about how life has come about and not just one way, among others, to view life.

In the meantime, however, since rigorous science requires a sustained cooperative effort over generations – and philosophy is far from achieving such a goal – Husserl describes the workings of *Weltanschauung* philosophy, and how it transmits cultural values in an informal manner as wisdom. Husserl’s description of *Weltanschauung* prefigures some of Bourdieu’s key notions, such as point of view, position-taking, and

habitus. Trained in philosophy, especially phenomenology, before he abandoned the field for sociology, it is likely that Bourdieu studied this essay closely.

If Husserl still clings to what many would consider an outmoded notion of necessity, many of his other insights are still relevant and have been borrowed by others:

All life is taking a position, and all taking a position is subject to a must – that of doing justice to validity and invalidity according to alleged norms of absolute validations. So long as these norms were not attacked, were threatened and ridiculed by no scepticism, there was only one vital question: how best to satisfy these norms in practice. (140-41)

Echoing a sentiment found in Wilhelm Dilthey that Ortega y Gasset also found congenial, Husserl adds that now that science has come to question many of the certainties of the past, we must still take a stand on issues for which science can currently give us no guidance: “We must bestir ourselves to harmonize the disharmonies in our attitude to reality – to the reality of life, which has significance for us and in which we should have significance – into a rational, even though unscientific, ‘world-and-life-view’” (141). This passage could have been written by Santayana who arrived at similar ideas independently from Husserl. The difference being that Santayana accepts this as a permanent condition, rather than a temporary one that will one day be overcome by the certainty of science.

Like Bourdieu will later do, Husserl finds the nexus between the external world and each individual to be the habitus; “Experience as a personal habitus is the residue of acts belonging to a natural experimental attitude, acts that have occurred during the course of life.” If this statement sounds a lot like Bourdieu, Husserl is careful to avoid the deterministic implications pursued by the former: “This habitus is essentially conditioned by the manner in which the personality, as this particular individuality, lets

itself be motivated by acts of its own experience, and not less by the manners in which it lets experiences transmitted by others work on it by agreeing with it or rejecting it” (131). Clearly, the individual has a choice to “let” experiences transmitted by the habitus have an influence.

This habitus for Husserl goes from the loftiest, traditional values associated with *Weltanschauung* – wisdom and culture – all the way down to the vagaries of everyday experience, which in the great philosopher will be “interiorly most rich,” even while his understanding of this area of his life remains “vague and unconceptualized” (132). Certeau could have cited this passage to make his point that the habitus can constitute features of personality that cannot be easily articulated, rather than unconsciously determine the content of someone’s ideas.

Philosophy, for Husserl, represents seeing reality from the highest “point of view” (*Gesichtspunkt*), a phrase that he relies on throughout his essay. His phenomenology posits, not objects, but phenomena, which are given in a flux or “flowing” that cannot be excluded by the theorizing mind: “One must . . . take phenomena as they give themselves, i.e., as this flowing ‘having consciousness,’ as present or pre-present, as imagined or symbolic or copied, as intuitive or represented emptily, etc” (108-09). Accepting the vagaries of experience means that “we must take phenomena as they turn this way or that, transforming themselves, according as the *point of view* or mode of attention changes in one way or another” (Italics mine 109).

For Husserl, *Weltanschauung* and philosophy proper remain distinct and separate: “That in particular the value of *Weltanschauung* stands with utmost firmness on its own foundation, that it is to be judged as the habitus and accomplishment of the individual

personality whereas science is to be judged as the collective accomplishment of generations of scholars” (143). Bourdieu will, of course, conflate the very two areas that Husserl hoped to keep separate. In Husserl each one functions and reproduces itself in a different manner, *Weltanschauung* “teaches the way wisdom does: personality directs itself to personality. As a teacher in the style of such a philosophy, then, he alone may direct himself to a wider public who is called thereto because of particularly significant character and characteristic wisdom” (144). One may think (almost impossible not to) of Socrates as the archetype for what Husserl has in mind here. Science, in contrast, remains “impersonal,” “Its collaborator requires not wisdom but theoretical talent” (144). Husserl uses the example of profundity as a characteristic of early science, one that disappears when it becomes sufficiently developed to express itself in clear and distinct ideas.

Traditionally, philosophy has been divided into three areas: the study of man, world and the transcendent. Under the first rubric, one often finds statements that relate to human beings as determined by the habitus of philosophy, which is best viewed as a subset, or refinement of the metaphilosophical meditations that have from its inception accompanied philosophical thought. In *Metaphilosophy and Free Will*, Richard Double makes a persuasive case for considering philosophical positions in the context of extra-philosophical considerations:

Although our conception of philosophy does not fix our metaphilosophy, in giving a metaphilosophy we presuppose a vision of philosophy. We cannot decide what anything is for without having an idea of what it is like. The question of what philosophy is provides a needed starting point for our inquiry into what philosophy is for, even if it will not give us the endpoint. Interestingly, our decision as to what philosophy is for indirectly affects our decision of what philosophy is. (20)

Metaphilosophical considerations have always been implicit within philosophy proper. Husserl's essay, for example, is more an extended meditation on what philosophy ought to become with no real argumentation for a philosophical position, which he does provide in other works.

Metaphilosophies involve general assumptions about the nature of philosophy that cannot be proved to be true or false because they involve "differing interests, temperaments, values, and desires" (19). For example, the matter of what role philosophy should play in people's lives or of what it is capable of doing cannot be settled by any established method, since the very choice of such methods greatly depends on the position one takes on such issues. Intermediate principles, while more specific, cannot be true or false because they are regulative and usually not "truth-valued" (47). Double refers to the principles he describes as intermediate because they serve to link metaphilosophies to specific philosophical positions. Strictly speaking, therefore, neither metaphilosophies nor intermediate principles can be established to be true through the use of logical or empirical methods. They depend much more on temperament and personal preference than it is commonly acknowledged.

Double argues that one set of metaphilosophies have historically emerged from answers given to the fundamental question of whether the value of philosophy is intrinsic or extrinsic. For those who have assumed that philosophy represents an intrinsic good, two conflicting goals have been posited: "(a) philosophy's purpose is to seek truth irrespective of any other benefit that might result from the pursuit of truth. (b) Philosophy's aim is to produce interesting modes of intellectual insight without claiming

to present the truth.” Two separate answers have also emerged for those who conceive of philosophy as having extrinsic value: “(c) Philosophy’s purpose is to help make life better, whether by contributing to us as moral beings or by enhancing our ability to cope with nihilism, death and questions about the meaning of our lives. (d) Philosophy’s purpose is to help shore up some other area of our intellectual lives, such as science, religion, or common sense” (23).

These answers provide the basis for developing four different kinds of metaphilosophies that Double argues are relevant for understanding conflicting responses to the problem of “free will” in philosophy. These he characterizes as Philosophy as World Construction, Philosophy as Conversation, Philosophy as Praxis, and Philosophy as Providing Underpinnings: For Commons Sense, Religion, the Law, Natural Science, or Special Sciences – respectively. Double concedes that other metaphilosophies conceived as answers to other extra-methodological questions may have greater relevance for philosophical problems other than that of free will. It is to be expected, however, that the metaphilosophies he identifies will be applicable in other contexts than ones pertaining to the problem of free will, as he himself demonstrates through the use of a great variety of examples taken from different types of philosophy.

Combining the insights of Husserl and Double one could say that individual habitus develops partially in response to the complex answer to the question what philosophy is for, with the attendant circularity that the latter describes. So, the two often imply each other and it is difficult to sort one out from the other.

For Santayana, what philosophy is for may be characterized as having conversations about world constructions, which combines both answers A and B to the

question of how philosophy may be seen as an intrinsic concern. This lifelong tension in Santayana's thinking became a central issue in his correspondence with James.

Interestingly, and of grave concern to James, however, Santayana's habitus conforms to philosophy pursued as an intrinsic good, as exemplified by some of his chosen, model philosophers – Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Spinoza. Santayana is best characterized as the great harmonizer in philosophy; hence, he also attempts to harmonize elements from extrinsic philosophy. One might best characterize his pragmatism, for example, as engaging in philosophy for its own sake, which, in turn, yields beneficial results for individual human beings and humanity as a whole. Needless to say, such an answer to the significance of philosophy would appear enigmatic and anathema to the practical James.

James's habitus is not easy to classify. One is tempted to say that it is his own unique invention, as an imitation of the similar situation found in his father's writings. Or, one might simply say that his habitus represents the polar opposite of Santayana's. For James, philosophy should attempt to look at every option, but not worry too much about harmonization, for this could all too easily lead to distortions and oversimplifications. One can relate James's attitudes about philosophy to Heraclitus and Nietzsche, except that his was much more of a habitus *clivé*, since he wished to avoid his father's fate as an eccentric author no one read. Pace Santayana, James was so unique in this matter, that it can be said that he is the American philosopher *par excellence*. Like the famous American millionaires of the past, he was a self made man, but from the perspective of his having become a man of letters, one who could not easily follow in the footsteps of an established tradition or school of thought.

The notion of the habitus as a nuanced not always possible to unambiguously characterize response to what philosophy is for can also help to create more realistic categories for intellectual history. A useful way to highlight the differences between Santayana and James is to note that Santayana exhibits the habitus of a phenomenologist and James that of an existentialist. This is particularly relevant to their approach to religion. To say that Santayana was more phenomenological than existentialist James provides a way to understand both sides of their dilemma: how they could be reconciled as well as how difficult it would have been for them to get along.

Leaving open the question of whether philosophy could, should, or actually, in contemporary analytic circles, is on its way to achieving a unified approach, we must accept, particularly for the time period in question, the relativistic condition that differing philosophical ideals, along with discrepant methods and habitus remain in competition with each other. As Husserl notes, previous philosophy has always started anew, from scratch, with the expectation of settling the question of what philosophy is for, once and for all. No philosopher, however, has ever accomplished this goal, and at the turn of the century in America the conflict became particularly acute, as the emerging nation was trying to find its own distinctive philosophical voice.

Harvard, at this time, was a very different institution than it is today; during Santayana's lifetime, however, it would develop into a paragon for the modern university, establishing many of the academic norms most common in today's university. One of the most significant developments of this period was the professionalization of philosophy emanating from Harvard, which would not, however, become firmly

established until the 1930s with C. I. Lewis. Both James and Santayana were critical of this emerging tendency to place technical aspects of the field above all others.<sup>51</sup>

Santayana and James's difficulty in sorting out their differences is partly the result of their professional ambitions and how these diverged within their intellectual milieu at Harvard during the turn of the century. In accordance with Bourdieu's description, Santayana and James as ambitious scholars at Harvard belong to a "restricted field of cultural production," one that develops rules and procedures that are closely monitored by experts who can be fairly oblivious to the typical demands of regular markets. Restricted fields are sub-fields in which "the stakes of competition between agents are largely symbolic, involving prestige, consecration and artistic celebrity" (Johnson 15).

Taking these notions with the caveat that the field and habitus do not rigidly determine outcomes for individuals, one can still rely on them to shed light on the way James and Santayana struggle, yet fail to mediate their differences. The older, better established James's "feel for the game" would guide him away from Santayana in his own thought and writings, for to be seen as a close associate of Santayana could be the equivalent of academic suicide; to have his ideas spawn the philosophy of a Spaniard in exile, who rejected Protestantism and thought of scientific philosophy as something alien to the true spirit of the field must have been a source of anxiety for James. For this would come to reflect Santayana's lower, aesthetic, and judged by some to be an effeminate position, one which strained Harvard's norms of respectability. James would not be able

---

<sup>51</sup> See Kuklick, introduction.

to clearly articulate such a view, given his habitus, which extols the value of idiosyncratic and highly distinctive intellectual achievements. Yet, he would also fear the association with the eccentric Santayana as excessively reminiscent of his father's obliviousness to the reality of being undervalued as an intellectual figure.

Santayana, in contrast, who had aspirations that transcended the Harvard intellectual scene, had some misgivings of his own about what he perceived to be James's flawed academic persona. Ironically, although Santayana did not bow before the modern academy, he did have a more classical sense of philosophy, resembling Husserl's, as a game in which one did not explicitly contradict oneself, but attempted to reconcile one's thoughts within a system that could achieve a sense of balance, as in Classical art and philosophy. Hence, in a letter to Kallen in which he admits his pragmatic leanings, he also confesses an admiration for Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore, for these, however much they were seduced by modern scientific philosophy, still exhibited the calm countenance of traditional philosophy. With Husserl, he could say, "out of these historical philosophies there flow to us philosophical life – if we understand how to peer into them, to penetrate to the soul of their words and theories – philosophical life with all the wealth and strength of living motivations" (146).

## Chapter 4: The Divided Soul of Henry James

### I. Henry James's Allusive Style

Henry James's writings require the identification and interpretation of his many-layered allusions. These come from many sources but often combine to create unique meanings in his works. It is not always sufficient to identify a single source for a symbol, since some images, such as those of doves and bowls have been used by different authors to similar, but different effects. Furthermore, different biblical images or citations have been used by other influential writers previous to James, whom he sometimes also has in mind when he alludes to a particular image or passage, meaning to invoke not only the biblical passage or classical image but its use in this previous author.

In the eyes of many critics, the morbid-minded type receives the greatest impetus in Henry James's fiction. Kristin Boudreau, in *Henry James' Narrative Technique*, for example, assumes, following Martha Nussbaum, that "James' fiction, early and late, considers the complicated place of the individual in a social world that often seems as coldly intricate or ruthlessly indifferent as his father's or Swedenborg's world order but without their clear-cut paths to deliverance" (30). Lewis comes closer to the truth, however, as he includes the healthy-minded as an essential component of James's worldview, for although James sees evil as "ingrained in the individual," and this represents something that "he shares with the sick soul," but he "also recognizes the need to confront and live with evil in this world," a characteristic of healthy-mindedness (63).

This tension between the types is a central concern of his novels, and one that closely resembles William James's ambiguous oscillation between the scientific and

religious paradigms. Bruce L.R. Smith, in one of the best introductions to the work, wonders, concerning *Wings of a Dove* – “Why does James – one of the most secular of authors, whose only religious inclination seems to have been a nodding interest in his brother William’s ideas about consciousness and the afterlife – choose the religious symbol of the dove for his heroine?” (xxxix). Smith’s reference is to Henry James’s essay “Is There a Life After Death?” and his claim is that this essay expresses Henry James’s only involvement with his brother’s ideas. And, that at most, he is just alluding to them in a casual manner.

In actuality, the essay represents an extended meditation on William James’s religious ideas and makes explicit how extensively he shared his brother’s worldview. Like his brother, Henry James cannot exclude the possibility of the existence of “something more” that would make immortality a possibility. With this unique piece, written for an anthology on the subject, Henry James joins several other authors “who grew up with religious certainty but saw this challenged and changed by science.” All the essays from this anthology also have in common “the appeal to personal experience and to the authority of inner sensation” (Hutchinson 128). In keeping with his indirect style, James takes a position that has some striking similarities to that of his famous brother, but expressed in a wholly different tone. The artist lives in a world of “sources” that inspire, “The complete privation” of which “is worthy but of the wit of a sniggering little boy who asks his dog jump at a morsel only to whisk it away; a practical joke of the lowest description, with the execrable taste of which I decline to charge our prime originator” (125). To definitively deny his sources existence would be malicious. Therefore, one should keep an open mind.

The dog analogy for discussing the world of human beings relative to that of the transcendent was a favorite of William James's, a particularly famous example being that of "Is Life Worth Living?": "Our dogs, for example, are in our human life but not of it. They witness hourly the outward body of events whose inner meaning cannot, by any possible operation, be revealed to their intelligence, – events in which they themselves play the cardinal part" (26). This observation causes him to reminisce back to a time when the sight of a dog being vivisected at a laboratory prompted him to think about how such an animal would perhaps acquiesce to its hellish condition if it only knew of the good that could come of the experiments being performed: "Healing truth, relief to future sufferings of beast and man, are to be bought by them. It may be genuinely a process of redemption" (27). This dubious claim, in turn, leads James to one of his most criticized examples of pragmatic thought, in which a person in need of making a dangerous leap is best to believe that he or she can succeed: "*believe what is in the line of your needs*, for only by such a belief is your need fulfilled" (28). This represents the shallow form of pragmatism that irked Santayana, one that suggests one may choose to simply adopt any belief, including that of life after death, for instance, if it will only lead to desirable consequences in someone's life.

James takes issue with his brother's pragmatism and its reliance on belief, a word he carefully avoids until the end of the essay, and then only to place it side by side with desire. For Henry James, Lewis contends, "the difference between 'desire' and 'will' lies in the physicality of desire and its tendency to confound and surprise the desiring subject" (79). Social contracts demand willful assent, while "traditional forms of belief demand acceptance on the basis of faith." William James attempts to resolve this tension, as his

“will to believe lies somewhere in between – the product, paradoxically, of an effort willfully to submit to a fiction that demands passive submission.” Henry James’s alternative is that of the shared fiction, which serves as a vehicle to probe “the way that such a will to believe interacts with our desires and interests.” This interaction between “will, desire, and belief seem to . . . have profound effects not only on his characters, but on his readers” (80). Henry James’s approach to the question of the meaning of life employs desire to the same ends that James did belief.

James, however, goes beyond the consideration of shared fictions and desires in his depictions of a material reality that cannot be changed by any of the characters in his works of fiction, something he leaves out of account in his essay on death. For James, death often functions to deepen the moral sense of his characters, as is most clearly the case in *The Wings of the Dove*. His depiction of how mature experience can mitigate the harshness of the material world leads to an ambiguity that is often expressed in terms of James’s inability to deal with experience without also overly countenancing the perspective of innocence, making it at times seem as if the latter were a superior source of knowing. Charles Thomas Samuels in *The Ambiguity of Henry James* argues that James achieves his most balanced perspective on this matter in *The Ambassadors*, and his least balanced one in *The Wings of the Dove*.

“Is There Life after Death?” becomes almost a synonym for “Is Life Worth Living?": “And when once such a mental relation to the question as that begins to hover and settle, who shall say over what fields of experience, past and current, and what immensities of perception and yearning, it shall *not* spread the protection of its wings?” To which he defiantly adds, “No, no, no, – I reach beyond the laboratory-brain” (127).

Henry James explores the latter in its everyday, rather than strictly scientific settings, however, but much to the same effect as his brother's more technical approach to the question. Both, in the end, gesture beyond the laboratory-brain, but still remain tethered to its demands.

Henry James's parallel analysis of pragmatism, experience, and the transcendent leaves him in a similar position to that of his brother. His allusion to the dog analogy becomes complete when he explicitly mentions the laboratory along with his desire to go beyond it. Finally, his allusion to his own novel via his wings metaphor suggests that his connection to his brother's ideas go well beyond a simple nodding acquaintance. Consequently, in his novel, *The Wings of the Dove*, Milly conquers the laboratory, calculating brain of Kate Croy, but the action is reversed in *The Golden Bowl*, where innocence clearly gives way to experience.

The theme of innocence is often invoked through a character's search for or concern with purity, which represents an essential aspect of morbid-minded individuals' psychological makeup, particularly when taken to extremes. William James refers to it as one of the "symptoms" of saintliness, one that could be taken to excess, as it was indeed in the father's religious views (*Remains* 13, 57). In *Varieties*, saintliness comes about as the result of a conversion experience "The shifting of the emotional center brings with it, first, increase of purity. The sensitiveness to spiritual discords is enhanced, and the cleansing of existence from brutal and sensual elements becomes imperative." Hence, a new sensitivity comes about by which "the saintly life must deepen its spiritual consistency and keep unspotted from the world" (241). This means that "All the mind's objects and occupations must be ordered with reference to the special spiritual excitement

which is now its keynote. Whatever is unspiritual taints the pure water of the soul and is repugnant” (255). Purity can, consequently, express itself outwardly or inwardly, either trying to fix the world or isolate its imperfections from the individual.

Henry James’s use of a highly allusive style that invokes several meanings at once became most prevalent in his later works. His two final novels, for instance, announce a religious theme through the biblical allusions of their respective titles: “‘Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away and be at rest’ (Psalms 55:6),” and “‘Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth, [before] . . . ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it’ (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 6-7)” (Lewis 54-55). Both passages resonate with a biblical quotation in *Varieties* that similarly expresses sick soul sentiments: “‘If a man lives many years and rejoice in them all, let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many’ (Ecclesiastes 11.8, *Varieties*, 139)” (Lewis 54).

The biblical context of these images does not, however, exhaust James’s intent in using them. Jonathan Freedman has demonstrated how extensively James alludes to British aestheticism, finding that his central idea for *Wings of a Dove*, that of someone facing impending death, is also found at the end of Pater’s *The Renaissance* (Boudreau 103). “James’ title, moreover, echoes the epigraph to *The Renaissance* drawn from Psalms 68: ‘Yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove,’ a reference to some great treasure (‘covered with silver’) found among the spoils of war” (Boudreau 103-04). In a similar fashion, Lewis notes in passing that the “more immediate source” for the title of the last novel “may be William Blake: ‘Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod / Or Love in a golden

bowl?’ James’ father had edited a volume of the work of Blake, who like him drew inspiration from the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg” (201; fn 7).

James alludes to images that invoke several sources at once – the bible, his brother’s religious ideas, as well as other literary works, surprisingly, including that of Euripides – in order to communicate his vision of a world vitiated by ambivalence. Like Euripides, James explores this ambivalence with the aid of devices that resemble his famous *Deus ex machina* in not allowing the reader to achieve closure. Concerning this uniquely Euripidean dramatic technique, Moses Hadas explains that although “It was once the fashion to condemn this practice, for only a botcher could get his plot so involved as to require so illogical a solution” (xv), it seems more feasible to understand the action as occurring at two levels. Euripides had no problem with relying on the Gods to explain traditional practices and institutions, but “objects to . . . making the Gods responsible for the motivations of men confronted by human practices. If you insist on the traditional happy ending, he seems to be saying, here it is; but I will make it as hard as I can for you to accept, and I hope you will not” (xvi).

Allusions to Euripides become most prominent in James’s novels when he confronts issues pertaining to the sick soul. The theme of purity in *The Bostonians*, for example, bears some similarities to Euripides’ treatment in *Ion*, an important work that also uses many images that become symbols in the late novels. In Euripides’ dramas, purity eludes all of his major characters, and no one is ever entirely justified in their actions, but artificially come to resolve their conflicts by the unexpected intervention of a God. This strategy of the *Deus ex machina* can be interpreted as a way of avoiding simple resolutions because while the less sophisticated minded may find them

convincing, the more sophisticated would recognize the unconvincing nature of such endings.

The novel clearly alludes to the world of Classical learning, as if to suggest that the theme of the battle of the sexes is nothing new, but part of our earliest cultural memories. Ransom describes Verena's nature as being one of being able "to shake her braided locks like a Naiad rising from the waves" (57). When he first meets her, she says to him that "I like opposition," to which he replies, "That proves . . . how in spite of your expression of horror you delight in the shock of battle. What do you say to Helen of Troy and the fearful carnage she excited?" (84). Verena also reacts to Olive's analysis of the dangers of matrimony by describing it in Classical terms: "The unexpected temperance of her speech on this subject . . . seemed to the girl to have an antique beauty, a wisdom purged of worldly elements; it reminded her of qualities that she believed to have been proper to Electra or Antigone" (130). The three major tragedians wrote about Electra, but only Euripides makes the setting a hut rather than a palace, describing the characters involved using real human attributes rather than following established types (Hadas 205).

The novel contains some parallels and allusions to the "Ion." Creusa endures a life of suffering for having been raped by Apollo. Deprived of her sexual purity, she gives up her child, assuming the God will take care of it. The God has supposedly done so, but she does not know it, so with him now grown, she has been deprived of having seen him go through all of the stages of becoming a man. Nameless, the child works keeping the temple pure for Apollo. Creusa's husband, Xuthus has gone to see the oracle at Delphi because he needs a son as an heir for Athens. The oracle suggests that the first young man he runs into will be his son, so he takes in the boy. Creusa, jealous over her

husband's ironic good fortune, attempts to kill Ion, as he has now been named by his father, as the etymology of the word in Greek (coming, going) fits the circumstances of their meeting.

Creusa, unhappy with having a newfound stepson, devises a plot to kill Ion by having her old retainer give him a potent drop of Gorgon's blood that she inherited from her father, Erichthonious, a son of Earth. The old retainer attends the festive occasion on her bequest and replaces the wine cups with goblets around the common bowl, and gives Ion a drink with the special poison. Trained in the ways of divination, however, Ion hears someone pronounce "an unlucky word," and has everyone dispose of their drinks: "The first libation he poured on the ground and he told all the others to spill theirs. Then, in solemn silence, we filled the sacred bowls with water and wine of Byblus. While we were thus engaged, new guests arrived – a flight of doves; they live in Loxias' temple unafraid" (161). Only the dove that drinks from Ion's cup dies, exposing the sinister plot.

*The Bostonians* also has a scene that alludes to alcohol using the image of the bowl. Concerning Mrs. Farrinder, a prominent leader of the movement, the narrator points out "She lectured on temperance and the right of women; the ends she labored for were to give the ballot to every woman in the country and to take the flowing bowl from every man" (28). The history of women's voting rights and prohibition are inextricably linked in America, as both the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> amendments were passed in response to an influential woman's organization.<sup>52</sup> Milly is also a dove whose death benefits others, causing them to face the moral predicament of the plot they have concocted to financially

---

<sup>52</sup> See Walker (440-41; fn. 5).

benefit from her death. Such images as “wings” and “bowls” become multivalent symbols, adding related meanings in different works.

Once Creusa is discovered to have initiated the conspiracy, she becomes hated by the people, who want her death, and she must take refuge in Apollo’s temple. Creusa’s poisonous drop significantly comes from the Gorgon, which is also the emblem on Athena’s shield, and is accompanied by another drop that can cure all illnesses. The old retainer asks if they are mixed or kept separate, to which she replies, “Separate. Good does not mingle with evil” (157). This is deeply ironic, since she is plotting to murder a young man, and the great difficulty involved in keeping evil separate from good is at the heart of both the ancient playwright and modern novelist’s works. Like Creusa, the healthy-minded Kate Croy believes that she can keep good separate from evil, as she conceives of her plot as benefiting everyone involved, including Milly who, condemned to death, can be loved in exchange for her postmortem inheritance.

When Creusa discovers that Ion is her long-lost son, both are saved from ultimate doom by Athena. As the *deus ex machina*, she prevents Ion from returning to the temple to inquire whether he has the truth about his lineage. Creusa and Ion agree to keep their kinship a secret from Xuthus, so he will not become jealous of her. The complication is that the key recognition scene had occurred through the actions of the Pythian Priestess, which are open to skeptical doubts, since the basket, which reason dictates should be at least as old as Ion, appears to be brand new. If one doubts that the Gods would be involved in human affairs in such a fashion, then the prophetess has good motivation to lie, for Ion could be her son, whom she wishes to make a prince by giving him over to Creusa and Xuthus. It is the tokens inside the brand new basket that provide the evidence

that Ion is the son of Apollo. This prevents Ion from killing Creusa, for her attempt on his life.

No matter how one interprets the play, the end result salvages the necessary appearances, but only at the expense of burying deeper truths that should lead to disillusionment for both characters and audience. Of course, Euripides' trick is that they are not buried too deeply. Henry James will highlight the same kinds of moral dilemmas at the end of his novels that create uncertainties that remain unresolved by an unsatisfying ending. Novels, however, can go well beyond the simple *deus ex machina* in creating ambiguous endings that force readers to attempt to find their own resolution to the complex problems treated in a work.

Several other aspects of *The Bostonians* hint at a connection with Euripides' "Ion." The structure of Euripides' play is that of light tragedy, which uses devices sometimes associated with comedy. James's novel strives to have a similar effect, coming across as a light tragedy with strong comedic strands. A. S. Byatt notes that "Olive Chancellor is some kind of judicial authority figure, though I have not seen any satisfactory explanation of her first name" (xviii). In "Ion," Athena represents the *deus ex machina* and Creusa's mentor, whose symbol is the olive because of her sacred tree at the Acropolis. One of the "tokens" that help establish Creusa's identity as Ion's mother is "a crown of olive . . . the olive that Athena first brought to our rock" (168). Athena's involvement in the play as an authority becomes comic through its lack of believability, and naming Olive after her suggests that she is also an authority that is not to be trusted. Verena is also described using the goddess's Latin name: "she took it seriously, without any flutter or protest, and had no more manner about it than if it concerned the goddess

Minerva.” The Latin is appropriate for Verena’s lighter approach, as she knows that part of her appeal is bringing in outsiders “who don’t care about anything unless it is amusing” (219).

Another connection between James’s novel and Euripides’ play is the suffering of women as Creusa notes: “We women find men harsh judges; those of us who are honest are lumped together with those who are not and tarred with the same brush; this means we are born to a life of tears” (113). This theme, more extensively expressed in *Medea* where it becomes more central to the action, appears in James’s novel with similar overtones and Olive’s complaints against men are akin to those expressed in Euripides’ plays than to those of latter day feminists.

Finally, in the opening of the novel Ransom asks Mrs. Birdseye to “forgive his Boetian ignorance” (6). This alludes to the beginning of Creusa when Xuthus comes away with no answer from the Boetian, Tryphonius. Verena is described as a Sibyl (147) and as possessing “the Sibylline mood (in its charming form)” (152). The name is associated with Apollo’s prophetess.

The “*Ion*,” as a psychological drama that explores optimistic solutions to complex problems that leave an undertone of underlying pessimism on account of unsatisfying endings, provides part of the symbolic scaffolding to be found in James’s fiction that most directly deals with religious themes. In the later novels, James takes up the intricacies of these issues in a world that resembles that of *The Bostonians* in broad features, but that better captures the complexities of a Euripidean drama.

## II. The Influence of the Father

William and Henry James contrast as to how they took in the religious views of their father. Henry James Sr. was a spiritual man and religious thinker who devoted the bulk of his adult life to writing about religious and moral issues under the supposed influence of the mystic Swedenborg. Although his conversion experience closely corresponds to the narrative of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, he did not belong either to any particular group of Swedenborg's followers or to any specific denomination of Christianity.<sup>53</sup> As a result of his spiritual isolation, the father's presence within the family became the image of a Promethean laborer who "worked at his writing table at home in full view of his family, turning out one long book after another, each a theological tirade in a private, sealed language interspersed with brilliant flashes of insight and imagery." This portentous image left a lasting impression, as Henry James "later looked back on the dreadful – and moving – futility of his father's intellectual labors, on 'the pathetic tragic ineffectualness of poor father's lifelong effort, and the silence and oblivion that seems to have swallowed it up.'" William James once summed up the father's labors with a drawing, "a frontispiece for his father's book; it showed a man beating a dead horse" (Richardson 29).

In a scene that is charged with the intensity and pathos of a great fictional account, "Harry" (one of Henry's many family nicknames), at the cemetery, reads to his deceased father a letter from his famous brother that must have expressed similar sentiments as his own. After explaining his absence to "my blessed old father," and

---

<sup>53</sup> For a brief discussion and some sources that deal with the issue of Henry James Sr.'s conversion, see Collister (Notes 128 fn 268, 137 fn 279).

exclaiming that “you’ve given your message to the world in many ways and will not be forgotten,” the son acknowledges the father’s extensive influence: “In that mysterious gulf of the past, into which the present soon will fall and go back and back, yours is still for me the central figure.” Unlike Henry James, however, William acknowledges that “All my intellectual life I derive from you, and though we have often seemed at odds in the expression thereof I’m sure there’s a harmony somewhere, and that our strivings will combine.” James concludes with a promise to redeem his father’s works for the public at large; “What my debt is to you goes beyond all my power of estimating. – so early, so penetrating and so constant has been the influence. You need have no anxiety about your literary remains – I will see them well taken care of” (Richardson 229).

Henry Sr.’s religious perspective did leave its indelible mark on the sons’ religious views and intellectual careers, but it is only William who “tried to conserve the values his father had contended for, while restating the entire matter on a different plane and in the light of different information” (Grattan 4-5). Henry James did not exactly share this goal. Peter Collister notes a “divergence of interest and sympathy between the two men [Henry and his father].” The young Henry’s “stated antipathy for the abstract and his intuitive and inexhaustible insight into the more tangible arena of human values and motives – may help explain his father’s evidently dismissive estimation of his potential as a boy” (Notes 136 fn 278).

The influence of the father was most extensive and direct on the older brother who attempted to understand and explain the father’s beliefs from within. William James acknowledges his father’s influence in a letter from 1896 to Henry Rankin, a librarian who Richardson notes “elicited from James some of his least coy and most direct

descriptions of his own beliefs and intentions.” James confesses “I am more interested in religion than anything else.” He continues with the significant qualification, “but with a strange shyness of closing my hand on any definite symbols that might be too restrictive. So I cannot call myself a Christian, and indeed . . . go with my father in not being able to tolerate the notion of a selective personal relation between God’s creatures and God himself as anything ultimate” (365).

The father’s beliefs also had an indirect effect on Henry through the influence of his brother, since Henry and William’s closeness, well attested to by biographers and critics, was lifelong and constant. After William James’s death, Henry wrote: “I sit heavily stricken and in darkness – for from far back in dimmest childhood he had been my ideal Elder Brother, and I still, through all the years, saw in him, even as a small timorous boy yet, my protector, my backer, my authority and my pride” (Mathiessen 345). Their closeness did not exclude sibling rivalries that were often settled, at least externally, by Henry admitting William’s point. Yet, this never thwarted Henry James’s independence of thought or creative impulse, which flowed on mostly unhampered by the senior brother’s disapproval.

Each brother made two major attempts at sorting out the influence that the religious views of the father represented in their lives, with Henry James chronologically having the last say each time. First to appear was the father’s final book in 1884 with a long introduction, in which William James “presents many of the editor’s characteristic views, such as the antithesis between monism and pluralism, healthy-mindedness and the sick soul, religion and moralism, and the appeal to practice for the decision between

them” (McDermott 822).<sup>54</sup> A year later, Henry James published *The Bostonians*, which turned out to be a distressing career move, in part for presenting his father's controversial social ideas. Neither made money from their respective works and both books were mostly ignored critically as well.

Later in life, each addresses the matter of the father's religious ideas once more, as William James reconsiders the formulations he used in his father's book for the Gifford Lectures. This time his father is mentioned only in passing, and James strongly declines his French translator's offer to include some of the father's material in the French translation (*Varieties* 449). Henry James also addresses the father's views once again after William's death in his autobiographical *Notes of a Son and Brother*. Henry James always wrote of the father and the brother together, seeing the father's religious views through the framework made most explicit by the brother in his interpretation. Rather than proffer a significantly different account of his father's religious views, he works within the material before him, shifting established priorities rather than explicitly altering the content of beliefs. He, for instance, minimizes the role of conversion in his works, greatly diminishing its significance.

*The Bostonians* should be partially understood in the context of William James's introduction to *Remains*, as Henry James uses the novel to implicitly comment on the religious typology. Although dealing with Henry James Sr.'s religious ideas at this moment in time was a difficult task for each of them, both personally and professionally, doing so had an air of inevitability to it for the sons, as each one sets about the same task

---

<sup>54</sup> Henry James in a very vague statement claims to have had some slight involvement with this work (*Notes* 129).

independently from the other. And, both paid a considerable price for engaging with their progenitor when either could have simply let the matter drop from public consideration and dealt with it privately. Unless driven by an intense psychological need to redeem the father in the eyes of the public, or simply to stand up for the traditions of the family, the publishing of *Literary Remains* and *The Bostonians* remains difficult to fathom.

### III. Purity and Desire in *The Bostonians*

Ambivalence about the value of innocence pervades *The Bostonians*. Verena is the very pinnacle of purity. Everything about her is described as pure, her voice, her eyes, her speech. Olive and Basil each believe that they can rescue her purity, but in the end can only be a corruptive influence upon her. Consequently, the novel examines the limits of purity and its pursuit, as would later be done by William James in *Varieties*. When it becomes part of a conversion narrative, as it has for Olive, it becomes “hard” and part of an ideological process that remains ascetic, or overly detached from desire. Olive is critical of Verena’s purity inasmuch as she cannot control it, but the plot comes to reveal the precarious nature of ideological purity that Olive espouses, as their relationship becomes undone by the material world of desire.

Olive’s political enthusiasm is much more a faith and a search for redemption than the pursuit of concrete political ends, even if she can hardly acknowledge it. Theirs (Olive’s and Verena’s) was a sacred cause and Verena a Jesus figure that, after thinking about it for hours, Olive could hardly explain as coming from such lowly and despicable origins as were her parents: “She had come to consider the girl a wonder of wonders, to

hold that no human origin, however congruous it might superficially appear, would sufficiently account for her; that her springing up between Selah and his wife was an exquisite whim of the creative force,” as indeed Olive considers the origins of all such geniuses (107-08). Hence, Verena is the very pinnacle of purity. Everything about her is pure, her voice, her eyes, her speech. Olive and Basil are like a couple of vultures out to devour her purity, however much each may be unawares of what they are destined to do. Each believes they can rescue her purity, but can only be a corruptive influence upon her. Consequently, the novel examines the limits of purity and its pursuit, as would later be done by William James in his chapter on saintliness in *Varieties*, but more thoroughly for also critiquing the conversion narrative that comes to structure William James’s religious thought.

The main character, Basil Ransom, is a Southerner who attempts to succeed as a lawyer in New York during the Restoration. When he is invited by his cousin Olive to visit her in Boston, he develops a romantic interest in Verena Terrant, a talented and attractive young woman who is quickly becoming a rising star for the feminist movement. Olive uses feminist ideals, a move with obvious lesbian overtones, as a pretext to keep Olive living at her house for the purposes of education. The conservative Ransom, in contrast, will criticize Verena’s feminist ideals in ways that the innocent, sheltered young woman had never heard anyone do before, and will ultimately, not without great hesitation on her part along with forebodings of future regret, opt to marry him at the very end of the novel.

The setting of the novel reflects Henry James’s perception of Boston when he returns to America in the 1880s, at which time “James felt estranged and depressed. He

was repelled rather than attracted by the post-Civil War prosperity and commercial expansion, and thought Boston both ugly and noisy.” He further noted the sudden predominance of women: “There was some realistic basis for this impression; the heavy casualties of the Civil War and the departure of many men for the western territories had produced a population imbalance in the East; and women, for the first time, were moving into their professions” (Lurie xi). Consequently, James’s realistic depiction of Boston creates an appropriate setting for dramatizing the father’s social views.

In *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius: a Biography*, Fred Kaplan describes the character of Basil Ransom as “by a deft ironic turn” transforming Henry’s father into “a noble southerner, an unreconstructed idealist, who embodies the social, secular extrapolations of Henry senior’s religious ideas without himself having any religious or theological ideas at all” (281). This choice follows from James’s later description of how he had always related to his father’s ideas in an external fashion, avoiding the intricate theology altogether. Similarly, conversion is treated in a critical fashion, as the mutual attraction between Ransom and Verna easily overcomes the latter’s earlier conversion to feminist ideals.

Given the father’s unusual personality along with the social changes that resulted from the war, the notion of the *Habitus* becomes useful for helping to make explicit James’s choice of transfiguring his father into a Southerner. The novel strongly portrays a critical awareness of the difference between acting from a clearly conceived code and a vaguely felt one. Throughout the novel ideas are described as either belonging to one group or the other. For example, Ransom describes his “convictions” as existing “in a vague, unformulated state in the minds of a great many of my fellow-citizens. If I should

succeed some day in giving them adequate expression I should simply put into shape the slumbering instincts of an important minority” (307). This description markedly contrasts with Dr. Prance’s “Puritan Code” and his own simple Chivalric code when it comes to women. These are both very explicitly taught and readily recognizable as a clear set of ideas and proscribed behaviors.

Henry James Sr. was an eccentric man, who for various reasons – his traumatic accident, the erratic and lonesome manner in which he had to pursue his religious studies – never fit comfortably into the societies in which he flourished. He never found himself entirely at home in any country or social group. If Henry James found the new social circumstances in America disconcerting, the father no doubt felt equally out of place in them, particularly as he thought of salvation in societal rather than individual, personal terms.

Consequently, the habitus of an old-fashioned Southerner creates a similar effect as did his father’s, since both remained quixotically aloof from emerging social trends while eliciting curiosity and bewilderment from those around them. During Reconstruction, a typical Southerner would likely hold on to his views of the world, for no war could so radically obliterate the sense of the past in which the South was rooted. Nor could by a single stroke all traditions, along with their subtle influences, be eliminated as determinants from individual consciousness and character. Thus, the new social reality demanded of Basil Ransom a sensibility that he lacked, a difficulty that the father also experienced, creating a tension that neither could ever entirely resolve.

Like a personage from the fading South, Henry James Sr. strikes others who don’t share his background and values as peculiar. In actuality, he is a remnant from another,

much more theological age (Remains 13). Similarly, Basil was well read, possessed intellectual curiosity, was educated and motivated to succeed, yet ineffectively struggled to do so as a lawyer and writer: “Ransom sat for hours in his office, waiting for clients who either did not come, or, if they did come, did not seem to find him encouraging, as they usually left him with the remark that they would think what they would do.” So few returned, however, “that at last he began to wonder whether there were not a prejudice against his Southern complexion. Perhaps they didn’t like the way he spoke.” He would be willing to learn new ways, “but the manner of New York could not be acquired by precept, and example, somehow, was not in their case contagious. He wondered whether he were stupid and unskilled, and he was finally obliged to confess to himself that he was unpractical” (171).

These are the kinds of doubts and confusions that occur when someone tries to make sense of a culture that remains foreign; no doubt, however, the description is also meant as a critical commentary on how America was transforming itself into much more of a commercial nation than it had been in the past. As a Southerner who was reared under different circumstances and traditions than those of the progressive Northeast, Ransom was too culturally removed from the *habitus* of a New York lawyer to come across as one to his potential clients. Similarly, his ideas were too far removed from modern expectations to seem palatable to any readership, a weakness that Verena was quick to focus on, as she asks him a second time, why he doesn’t publish his ideas. Ransom reflects, “This touched again upon the matter of his failure; it was curious how she couldn’t keep off it” (310).

How closely his characterization of Ransom corresponds to Henry James's perception of his father becomes apparent from his autobiography: "he had intellectually, convictionally, passionately speaking, a selfless detachment, a lack of what is called the eye for effect – always I mean of the elated and interested order – which I can but marvel at in the light of the rare aptitude of his means to his end, and in that of the beauty of both" (Notes 131). The final statement suggests that it may not be as much the father's character that is to blame, as the circumstances – the time and place – that seem inimical to his particular abilities and aptitudes. As a parody, the novel spares no one.

The sense of not entirely belonging to the dominant culture constitutes a defining trait of Ransom's character and one for which Verena represents a foil. Although she has no great education or professional training of any kind, she is embraced by society because of her universally recognized talent as a speaker. The requisite *Habitus* she has acquired imperceptibly through her family and their fake séances. Her father was an active proponent of the mind cure movement, who often spoke before all kinds of groups and performed cures. When Verena meets one of her idols from the feminist movement, Mrs. Farrinder perceives that, "from the first word she [Verena] uttered, with a promptness and assurance which gave almost the impression of a lesson rehearsed in advance. And yet there was a strange spontaneity in her manner, and an air of artless enthusiasm, of personal purity. If she was theatrical, she was naturally theatrical" (48).

This difference between herself and Basil is one of the first things that strikes her about him; after having spoken to Basil on only a few occasions Verena acknowledges that "he had a curious, but still a pleasant way" (214). Interestingly, for all the differences between them, it was not his explicit political views or a conscious awareness

of his cultural background which made Olive turn so decisively against Ransom initially, but an “unreasoned terror of the effects of his presence“(20), a terror also experienced earlier by Olive (10).

William James’s typology as modified by Henry James remains a dominant feature of both the action and the depiction of characters in a manner that makes it appear to be almost an objectively real feature of the world that they inhabit. The novel opens with Basil Ransom waiting for a distant cousin, Olive Chancellor, who has invited him to visit her in Boston. In the second chapter of *The Bostonians*, Ransom notes “that the simplest division it is possible to make of the human race is into the people who take things hard and the people who take them easy” (9). He then proceeds to identify Olive as one of those who takes things hard: “This was written so intensely in her delicate face that he felt an unformulated pity for her before they had exchanged twenty words. He himself, by nature, took things easy; if he had put on the screw of late, it was after reflection and because circumstances pressed him close” (9-10). He goes on to emphasize that “this pale girl, with her light-green eyes, her pointed features and nervous manner, was visibly morbid; it was as plain as day that she was morbid” (10).

Having already described him as lacking in experience, the narrator continues: “Poor Ransom announced this fact to himself as if he had made a great discovery; but in reality he had never been so ‘Boeothian’ as at that moment. It proved nothing of any importance, with regard to Miss Chancellor, to say that she was morbid; any sufficient account of her would lie very much to the rear of that. Why was she morbid, and why was her morbidness typical?” (10).

It is interesting that William James would base his later study of religious types on experience, finding evidence for them in varying religious texts, but without ever inquiring as to why his basic dichotomy should have such a central role. Henry James, in contrast, questions the provenance of the types, whether they should be considered to be inherently physical or psychological, or whether the typology should inherently privileged the morbid, and returns to these issues in his later novels. The typology becomes a central theme again in his final two novels: Henry James finishes *The Wings of the Dove* the same year that William James publishes the Gifford Lectures, and proceeds to write *The Golden Bowl* after it.

Ransom's typology finds expression throughout the novel, as key differences between the three main characters, Olive, Basil, and Verena become delineated in terms of those who "take things hard" and those who "take them easy." Ransom "himself, by nature, took things easy; if he had put on the screw of late, it was after reflection and because circumstances pressed him close" (10). In keeping with the general understanding that types are rarely pure, these characters fluctuate in their degree of morbidity, at times even experiencing life as viewed through the lens of the opposite type. Each character comes to perceive the corresponding type in others, recognitions that serve to move the action forward and convey to the reader a sense of the typology as if it were objective in nature.

Coming from a cultural background of "new ideas," Verena is increasingly becoming a celebrity among feminists. Having grown up in an environment of "nostrum-mongers," she simply repeated what she had always heard, or so Ransom liked to think: "It made no difference; she didn't mean it, she didn't know what she meant, she had been

stuffed with this trash by her father, and she was neither more nor less willing to say it than to say anything else” (56-57). Her ideas were rather incidental, for her effect on others had its origins in her tone as expressive of healthy-mindedness: “for the necessity of her nature was not to make converts to a ridiculous cause, but to emit those charming notes of her voice, to stand in those free young attitudes, to shake her braided locks like a naiad rising from the waves, to please every one who came near her, and to be happy that she pleased” (57).

In keeping with the basic theme of the novel, desire interposes itself between individuals and reality, so that the narrator must add, “I know not whether Ransom was aware of the bearings of this interpretation, which attributed to Miss Tarrant a singular hollowness of character.” Smitten as he was, it remains uncertain, as it often does in such mental states, whether he could clearly fathom the implications of becoming involved with someone whom he thought of in such shallow terms: “he contented himself with believing that she was as innocent as she was lovely, and with regarding her as a vocalist of exquisite faculty, condemned to sing bad music. How prettily, indeed, she made some of it sound!” (57).

Interestingly, Olive has a similar attitude towards Verena, making the development of her talent a personal project, eventually paying her opportunistic parents a large sum of money to allow Verena to mostly live with Olive in her home. She thought that with her feminist credentials and wealth, she could provide Verena with the intellectual substance that would harness her talents for the feminist cause. When Mathias Pardon, a suitor that her family thought professionally auspicious for her to accept, pursued Verena, Olive “thought him very inferior; she had heard he was intensely

bright, but there was probably some mistake” (117). Her desires clearly have taken over her thinking in this matter. With no real evidence, she thought Pardon “wasn’t half educated, and it was her belief, or at least her hope, that an educative process was now going on for Verena (under her own direction), which would enable her to make such a discovery for herself” (117).

Under Olive’s influence, Verena has a conversion experience, similar to the ones described later in *Varieties*: “The fine web of authority, of dependence, that her strenuous companion had woven about her, was now as dense as a suit of golden mail; and Verena was thoroughly interested in their great undertaking; she saw it in the light of an active, enthusiastic faith” (156). Although Henry Burrage also had an interest in Verena, it was of no great concern since the latter only saw him as a relief from the strenuousness of the ambiance created by Olive, and, in any case, by now she was fully committed to the movement, as to a religion: “her own springs were working; the fire with which she glowed came from within. Sacredly, brightly single she would remain; her only espousals would be at the altar of a great cause” (158).

Much as William James, Olive believes that her morbid mindset is superior to Verena’s healthy mindset on account of its single-minded approach to life. Hence, the monism of the morbid-minded versus the pluralism of the healthy-minded that accepts that the world consists of many principles or centers of action also finds explicit mention in the novel. Olive not only recognizes her own morbid character in these terms, but understands that it is not shared by Verena: “She had already quite recognised, however, that it was not of importance that Verena should be just like herself; she was all of one piece and Verena was of many pieces, which had, where they fitted together, little

capricious chinks, through which mocking inner lights seemed sometimes to gleam” (137).

Olive astutely realizes that Verena’s healthy-mindedness is the tragic flaw that has the potential, as it will eventually, of deflecting Olive from the movement; in Verena, Olive recognizes a healthiness (of a type) that has been raised to the highest level, becoming the equivalent of purity: “She was too rancourless, too detached from conventional standards, too free from private self-reference. It was too much to say of her that she forgave injuries, since she was not conscious of them; there was in forgiveness a certain arrogance of which she was incapable, and her bright mildness glided over the many traps that life sets for our consistency” (161). Related to this, Olive will also come to realize that Verena possesses the “subtle flaw” of not disliking men as a class (265). This, of course, becomes the source of all of Olive’s problems, for if Verena did share that hatred, then Olive might possess her wholly. Put differently, her natural innocence (purity) gets in the way of her achieving the single-minded perspective of Olive’s ideological purity.

Olive thought pride important for character, but also must acknowledge that Verena was too pure for it. All suffering melted away in her presence, as having “traversed a desert of sordid misery,” “these things had left no trace upon her person or her mind; everything fresh and fair renewed itself in her with extraordinary facility, everything ugly and tiresome evaporated as soon as it touched her” (161-62). Because Verena was so special to the movement, Olive, however, felt that she was entitled to great rewards and a privileged lifestyle: “In the future she should have exceeding luxury and ease, and Miss Chancellor had no difficulty in persuading herself that persons doing the

highest intellectual and moral work . . . owed it to themselves, owed it to the groaning sisterhood, to cultivate the best material conditions” (162). Never an avid pursuer of pleasures herself, she, nevertheless, knew how to conduct her financial affairs and since Verena had arrived at her home, “she [Olive] elevated daintiness to a religion” (162).

Ransom is as taken in by Verena’s purity as Olive, and his attitudes toward her situation are no less comical, as Henry James, even in this earlier work, depicts his characters as groping after a reality they can never come to fully control. After getting to know her, in one of the most entertainingly melodramatic sections in the book, he becomes determined to save her from the feminists, a motive that is questionable to say the least: “She was a touching, ingenuous victim, unconscious of the pernicious forces which were hurrying her to her ruin. With this idea of ruin there had already associated itself in the young man’s mind, the idea – a good deal more dim and incomplete – of rescue” (230). Before he can “open an unlimited credit of tender compassion,” however, he must become convinced that “her absurdity” is “a mere reflection of unlucky circumstance,” and “her charm . . . her own” (230). Like Olive, Basil is motivated by personal self-interest that he does not fully admit to himself.

On a visit that Olive and Verena make to New York, Basil tracks her down and convinces her to meet with him. A key recognition scene occurs when she decides to conceal her tryst from Verena on account of Olive’s morbid proclivity: “How terribly she worried about everything, and how tragical was her nature; how anxious, suspicious, exposed to subtle influences!” As will happen later with Maggie, information is withheld because the personage will not be able to absorb it on account of their character type.

At first Verena simply admired Olive's character as indicative of her devotion to the cause: "In their long intimacy Verena had come to revere most of her friend's peculiarities; they were a proof of her depth and devotion, and were so bound up with what was noble in her that she was rarely provoked to criticise them separately." Now that she is beginning to develop a love interest, Verena's perspective begins to change "suddenly, Olive's earnestness began to appear as inharmonious with the scheme of the universe as if it had been a broken saw; and she was positively glad she had not told her about Basil Ransom's appearance" (274).

Verena is forced to face the weaknesses of her idealistic system when she confronts Mrs. Burrage, the mother of a prominent suitor for Verena's affections. Verena has already turned down her son's proposal, but Mrs. Burrage, with her great experience, has guessed the extraordinary influence that Olive has over Verena, so she has Olive visit in order to convince her that it is in both their interests to have her son marry Verena. Mrs. Burrage highlights the many benefits that Olive and the movement would receive from the couple's union: Mrs. Burrage has a great deal more money, power, and influence than does Olive; her son, unlike Mathias Pardon, has an interest in Verena's views; and, from a purely practical viewpoint – being a woman herself and considering her son's love for Verena –, Mrs. Burrage is willing to become active on behalf of the cause. Olive finds Mrs Burrage's offer reprehensible, however, for not stemming from a genuine fervor for the ideals of the movement.

During an earlier visit, Olive had met Henry Burrage and had found him so appealing, that she had a hard time placing him in the category of despicable men, which prompted a minor crisis to her morbid purity: "He was so good-humoured, so amusing, so

friendly and considerate, so attentive to Miss Chancellor, he did the honours of his bachelor-nest with so easy a grace, that Olive, part of the time, sat dumbly shaking her conscience, like a watch that wouldn't go, to make it tell her some better reason why she shouldn't like him" (141).

For Henry James Sr. the word conscience was synonymous with religion, and Olive experiences Mrs. Burrage as a threat to her purity. The good-natured way in which her hostess seems unconcerned about Verena taking her son in marriage, considering that she belongs to a lower class than Mrs. Burrage, irks Olive, who is very aware of this difference: "Poor Olive was, in the nature of things, entangled in contradictions; she had a horror of the idea of Verena's marrying Mr. Burrage, and yet she was angry when his mother demeaned herself as if the little girl with red hair, whose freshness she enjoyed, could not be a serious danger" (142). Her morbid-mindedness results in her possessing a blinkered intelligence:

She saw all this through the blur of her shyness, the conscious, anxious silence to which she was so much of the time condemned. It may therefore be imagined how sharp her vision would have been could she only have taken the situation more simply; for she was intelligent enough not to have needed to be morbid, even for purposes of self-defence. (143)

Under the influence of her hostess, however, she is temporarily relieved from her burdensome conscience. "Mrs. Burrage asked her son to play 'some little thing,' . . . Olive was extremely susceptible to music, and it was impossible to her not to be soothed and beguiled by the young man's charming art." The music "of Schubert and

Mendelssohn” combined with other elements of the scene – odors and sights – caused Olive “for half an hour, to surrender herself, to enjoy the music, to admit that Mr. Burrage played with exquisite taste, to feel as if the situation were a kind of truce.” This respite is temporary for Olive, who does not fully register its general import: “Her nerves were calmed, her problems – for the time – subsided. . . . harmony ruled the scene; human life ceased to be a battle. She went so far as to ask herself why one should have a quarrel with it; the relations of men and women, in that picturesque grouping, had not the air of being internecine” (143).

Verena, not surprisingly, is moved even more intensely than Olive by the scene, as she exchanges occasional, spontaneous looks with her hostess while Olive stares at her, symbolizing the latter’s temporary detachment from the political tensions of the moment. The character playing the music has been appropriately named Henry and represents the romantic aspect of James’s art. The aesthetic experience that so moves Olive and Verena emerges from the unified nature of the experiential moment so that the whole becomes more than the parts. The spell is broken for Olive, however, when she notices Verena smiling back at Mrs. Burrage and thinks, “oh yes, she was giving up everything, all principles, all projects” (143-44). Suddenly, “Olive felt that they were both . . . demoralized” (144), but before she could drag her out, Verena had accepted an invitation to go to New York, one that Olive is then convinced to keep.

It was always Mrs. Burrage whom Olive really disliked and on Olive’s second encounter with her, when she finds herself alone with her in New York listening to her sensible proposals, noticing how incisive her comments, Olive cannot overcome her initial misgivings. She views her interlocutor as morally deficient; she asks herself how

she could believe “a type into which nature herself had inserted a face turned in the very opposite way from all earnest and improving things?” (283). Olive’s tone toward her remains invariable: “People like Mrs. Burrage lived and fattened on abuses, prejudices, privileges, on the petrified, cruel fashions of the past” (283). Olive explicitly couched her dislike of her in terms of the typology. When Mrs. Burrage describes all of the great characteristics of her son, Olive must admit them: “That was very true, and Olive felt all the more that the attitude of these fortunate people, for whom the world was so well arranged just as it was, was very curious” (285). Olive sees happiness and good fortune as a threat to her interests: “the fear that most glanced before Olive was not that this high, free matron, slightly irritable with cleverness and at the same time good-natured with prosperity, would bully her son’s bride, but rather that she might take too fond a possession of her. It was a fear which may be described as a presentiment of jealousy” (286).

In the presence of Mrs. Burrage, Olive can’t help but think in terms that transcend her usual genteelness and that reveal the kind of material reality that she wishes to elude. In her presence, it is clear that the movement, the ideals, her own putative purity do not represent her only or even her most genuine motivation. Her passion for Verena and the personal gains involved, perhaps even financial ones, are also at stake. When Mrs. Burrage first makes plain her objective in meeting with Olive, their exchange and her thoughts are revealing of Olive’s mental state. Mrs. Burrage says to her of Verena, “I daresay you don’t like the idea of her marrying at all; it would break up a friendship which is so full of interest’ (Olive wondered for a moment whether she had been going to say ‘so full of profit’), ‘for you” (282).

Mrs. Burrage's goal is to get Olive to relinquish Verena to Henry and this makes Olive feel uncomfortable, since she never deigns to understand her relationship with Verena in such realistic terms: "Your conviction with respect to my attitude being what I believe it to be," Miss Chancellor went on, "I am surprised at your not perceiving how little it is in my interest to deliver my – my victim up to you" (288). Condescending and arrogant as she intends to be, Olive is still forced to acknowledge, however reluctantly, an aspect of her relationship with Verena that she would rather never face.

Mrs. Burrage scores a definitive blow against Olive's genteel denials when she suggests that by allowing a union to take place between Verena and Henry, Olive could prevent a much worse outcome, such as having to endure Verena marrying Basil Ransom. He had come looking for Verena, and Mrs. Burrage had guessed the circumstances and quite by chance happened upon their meaning for Olive, causing the latter great discomfort: "Olive dropped her eyes; she couldn't endure Mrs. Burrage's horrible expression of being near the mark, her look of worldly cleverness, of a confidence born of much experience." Olive has been made to realize that she must confront this reality and resented that it had come from Mrs. Burrage and "her detestable wisdom" (290).

The experience left her disconcerted: "when she reached the street she found she was deeply agitated . . . she hurried along, excited and dismayed, feeling that her insufferable conscience was bristling like some irritated animal." Noting the excellence of the offer she has received, "there was no way for her to persuade herself she might be silent about it" (290). Afterwards, "She remained in her place an hour, brooding, tremulous, turning over and over certain thoughts. It seemed to her that she was face to

face with a crisis of her destiny, and that she must not shrink from seeing it exactly as it was” (292).

The following two chapters of the book, thirty three and thirty four, consist of Verena out on her secret date with Basil, having discussions with him that have a similar effect on her as do Mrs. Burrage’s on Olive. Verena inadvertently lets out that she has had to go behind Olive’s back to see him and brings up the issue of trust, to which Ransom reacts with “mocking amazement.” “Are you a little girl of ten and she your governess? Haven’t you any liberty at all, and is she always watching you and holding you to an account? Have you such vagabond instincts that you are only thought safe when you are between four walls?” (301). Verena had been living a sheltered life and one where everything was being controlled for her by Olive and the movement. Now out with Basil, she could perceive her situation differently.

To directly state the shortcomings of her current life with Olive becomes superfluous, as her experience with Basil eclipses it: “Once Verena was fairly launched the spirit of the day took possession of her; she was glad to have come, she forgot about Olive, enjoyed the sense of wandering in the great city with a remarkable young man who would take beautiful care of her, while no one else in the world knew where she was.” Unlike a drive she had been on with Mrs. Burrage the previous day, this outing “was more free, more intense, more full of amusing incident and opportunity. She could stop and look at everything now, and indulge all her curiosities, even the most childish; she could feel as if she were out for the day, though she was not really” (302). The whole scene reminds her of the few occasions that she had visited the country as a child, aimlessly drifting through “fields, looking for raspberries and playing the gipsy” (302).

When the conversation turned to their differences of ideas, she was taken aback by Basil's mockery – she had never heard anyone do that to her precious ideals. She was shocked to hear what she thought were outdated notions, such as, “what was needed for the good of the world was that people should make a better use of the liberty they possessed” (304). She was astounded by his view that “the spread of education [was] a gigantic farce – people stuffing their heads with a lot of empty catchwords that prevented them from doing their work quietly and honestly” (304). At first Verena would reply to him, for she did have the intellectual capacity to do so. But, it did not take her long to realize that she would not be able to convince him that she was right and he was wrong.

The decisive moment came when Basil points out that the movement did not represent an authentic choice for her; Verena was merely doing what she had always done – put on a show for others, first her parents, now for Olive: “It isn't *you*, the least in the world, but an inflated little figure (very remarkable in its way too), whom you have invented and set on its feet, pulling strings, behind it, to make it move and speak, while you try to conceal and efface yourself there.” Addressing her by her last name, he implores her to give in to her desires rather than be ruled by the artificial act that she has learned to put on for others: “Ah, Mrs. Tarrant, if it's a question of pleasing, how much you might please some one else by tipping your preposterous puppet over and standing forth in your freedom as well as in your loveliness!” (314).

Ransom's remarks have hit their mark, and like Olive, Verena must now confront an unpleasant reality, a fact that she conceals from her interlocutor as Olive had concealed her disillusion from Mrs. Burrage. Having listened attentively “with her eyes to the ground,” she now feels impelled to leave, suddenly feeling that “their association

had already lasted quite too long.” The truth is that “that description of herself as something different from what she was trying to be, the charge of want of reality, made her heart beat with pain, she was sure, at any rate, it was her real self that was there with him now, where she oughtn’t to be” (314-15). Verena flees from this moment of disillusionment into the arms of Olive, who has been contemplating their situation, thinking that she would make the deal with Mrs. Burrage. Her hours of morbid reflection came to naught as Verena, in tears, asks her to leave New York and never bring her back (318-19).

*The Bostonians* opens a limited view on the dilemmas created by the trappings of specific beliefs on account of Verena’s innocence, which spares her having to confront the entanglements and predicaments that commitment to a definite set of ideas can create for the consciousness of individuals who must confront specific situations relating to others who espouse similar beliefs. Ransom physically removes her from the feminist gathering that was to be her greater initiation as a rising star of the movement. This combined with her allowing herself to walk away with him, incognito and in tears, has an effect similar to that of a *deus ex machina*, one that preempts the very happy ending that it suggests: “It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed” (419).

The difference between the later novels and *The Bostonians* is in the narrative style. In the latter he “uses a kind of intrusive narrator” (Byatt xvii). Learning from his experience in the theater, however, the later James developed a new style that rather relies on “revelation of action through scene, use of dialogue as narration, removal of the omniscient author from his role as informer and commentator” (Edel 31). By essentially

eliminating the overly intrusive narrator, James can create endings that leave unresolved complications for readers to work through for themselves, a strategy that cost him readers (Edel 31).

#### IV. *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*

Boudreau explores the tension in James's thought, tracing one side of it to his brother's pragmatism and its roots in the empiricist tradition (impressions), the other to a Hegelian view that emerges late in his travel writings (ideas). In "The Beast in the Jungle," "Marcher's idea is more authentic than a mere opinion based on doctrines or principles." Following David Hume, "ideas . . . begin in impressions or sensations, which then give rise to fainter copies or memories of past impressions. These fainter copies are ideas, and to establish the reality of any idea, it must be traced to its impression. Any idea without an originary impression is merely an empty word or concept" (26). Hence, Boudreau reserves the term *idea* for dogmatic, rigid, or unquestioned beliefs, and *thought* for genuine, experienced-based beliefs that remain sensitive to the ever changing needs and perspectives of the real world.<sup>55</sup>

In her analysis, however, James's novels come down too exclusively on the side of impressions. James's passages dealing with impressions reveal one side of James's thinking, a more existential one that resembles his brother's idealistic, pluralistic universe. This is the aspect that most commentators focus on. Thus, although Boudreau

---

<sup>55</sup> Boudreau cites the famous passage by Eliot which suggests that "James did not provide us with 'ideas' but with another world of thought and feeling" (qtd. in Byatt xxiii). Byatt already points out that by ideas Eliot meant the Puritan derived ideological world that both James and Eliot grew up with (Byatt xxii). Boudreau's contribution was to interpret "thought and feeling" in terms of impressions.

devotes a chapter each to *The Bostonians* and *The Wings of the Dove*, she mostly ignores both Mrs. Burrage and Kate Croy. She also leaves out of her account *The Golden Bowl*. If these are given their due significance, then the tension in James becomes more pervasive. Lewis in his account emphasizes precisely these characters and provides an extensive analysis of *The Golden Bowl* that emphasizes its healthy-minded perspective.

The complex narrative style of Henry James can be elucidated by highlighting some key passages from some of his works, as he developed a distinctively self-conscious literary style. In the short story “The Real Thing,” for example, James explores the transfigurative nature of art. An artist who occasionally draws “illustrations” for “pot-boilers” receives a visit from a genuine lady and gentleman, who hope to pose as models for him (105). Having fallen on hard times, they expect that they can work as sitters since they essentially are, after all, the real thing –members of the British upper class who exhibit all of its characteristics. As the artist explores his options concerning how to use the couple, however, he finds himself distracted by the thought of how to portray *them*, rather than *who* they might model. He “liked them enough,” but could not believe in them. “Combined with this was another perversity – an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one: the defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation. I like things that appeared; then one was sure. Whether they were or not was a subordinate and almost always a profitless question” (110–11). The couple’s realness actually becomes an obstacle to the artist’s depicting what he perceives to be important, so that when he attempted to draw them, “I couldn’t anyhow get away from them – get into the character I wanted to represent; and I hadn’t the least desire my model should be discoverable in my picture” (124).

Although the couple most obviously belongs to the group that the narrator aims to draw, they fail to evoke the right impressions. They come across as awkward and rigid and cannot really achieve the variety of poses that other, lower class or even foreign models can easily achieve. Unencumbered by the burdensome decorum of the upper classes, models that do not belong to them can best represent the variety of attitudes that, as a group, they explicitly manifest. For in the end, it is the outward manifestation that impacts the consciousness of others in the form of definite impressions.

The centrality of impressions as the medium of the artist becomes most explicit in his later novels, as in *The Ambassadors*. The action takes place primarily in Paris where James depicts different temperamental and national types, exhibiting a variety of customs, manners, and habits of mind, including the Puritan, represented by “old Waymarsh,” who is described as possessing a “sacred rage” (41); James has Strether both laugh at his limitations and deeply respect his integrity. Strether never goes anywhere in Europe without him, and his attitude toward him is reminiscent of that between the author and his father. The two personages have been commissioned by Chad’s mother, Miss Newsome, to bring the young man back home to America, to fulfill his duties by marrying his American fiancée and assuming the responsibilities of running the family business. By stipulation of his father’s will, only if he fulfills these conditions will he be allowed to benefit from the family’s estate. Waymarsh, incapable of perceiving the delicate nuances and unique moral challenges posed by European customs, dutifully reports back to Miss Newsome Strether’s lapse in performing his assigned task of persuading Chad to return home.

Strether, in contrast, feels that he must understand Chad's situation on its own terms before he can decide whether to insist that the young man return home and assume the responsibilities expected of him. Chad asks Strether to consider the moral character of the married woman that he has become romantically involved with: "I should like so awfully to know what you think of her. It will really be a chance for you,' he had said, 'to see the *Jeune fille*' – I mean the type – as she actually is, and I don't think that, as an observer of manners, it's a thing you ought to miss." Types are derived, however, from varieties of individual impressions, for Strether's experience of the young woman's personality "will be an impression that – whatever else you take – you can carry home with you, where you'll find again so much to compare it with" (152). This suggests that the types remain unstable, temporary extrapolations that are open to later revision.

James relies heavily on the diverse impressions of his varied characters to achieve important effects, a strategy most explicit in his later novels, but which is also characteristic of his earlier works. The prominence that he gives to impressions has its roots in one aspect of his brother's work in philosophy, which stresses the relativity of values and of how these fail to achieve the status of absolute certainty in the modern world.<sup>56</sup>

The variability of individual impressions, however, creates an uncertainty that undermines rational stability. In Henry James's novel *The Tragic Muse*, for example, Gabriel Nash and Nick Dormer have a debate concerning the significance of the manner

---

<sup>56</sup> For a fairly brief discussion of the influence William James's writings had on Henry James see "Henry James and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*" in Lewis. Hutchinson explores other aspects of this influence as does Boudreau. As Lewis notes, however, "The lines of influence between Henry and William James are too complex to disentangle" (57).

in which individual artists must develop their typologies. Dormer notes “but if you go in for shades, you must also go in for names. You must distinguish,” Dormer objected. “The observer is nothing without his categories, his types and varieties.” To which Nash replies: “That’s for his own convenience; he has, privately, a terminology to meet it. That’s one style.” A dilemma ensues, as the artist will inevitably have to write for “the convenience of others,” for then “the signs have to be grosser, the shades begin to go. That’s a deplorable hour! Literature, you see, is for the convenience of others. It requires the most abject concessions. It plays such mischief with one’s style that really I have had to give it up” (28). The concern with artistic integrity of these various passages is linked to James’ epistemological reflections that privilege impressions over ideas.

In his last two novels, James once again takes up the religious typology, but this time within a more intricate world that embroils the characters in more complex situations that they cannot so easily disentangle themselves from. Lewis argues that in a world with no real possibility of supernatural intervention, the reaction of the main character to this reality differs by belonging to opposite types: “Milly is essentially a sick soul, whereas Maggie is strikingly healthy-minded; and this accounts in large part for the very different endings of the two novels” (55).

In *Wings of a Dove*, Milly Theale does constitute a sick soul, but coupled with an innocence and purity that resembles that of Verena. On a trip to Europe, the extremely rich Milly unwittingly comes to be the focal point of several conniving schemes at once, as several of her newfound European friends attempt to manipulate her for their own purposes. Milly represents innocence and as Boudreau notes is driven by impressions,

rather than ideas. Her innocence, however, contrasts with the worldliness of Kate Croy, a character whose significance is often played down by critics.

A rare exception is Smith's introduction to the novel, which provides an incisive analysis of her character. In James's initial notebook description, Kate was depicted as a rather flat, despicable character that becomes much more sympathetic in the novel, despite being "the instigator of an unsavory, not to say immoral scheme to exploit her sick friend. She is also the one figure in the book who is brutally honest. She is in a tough game, and it is hardly surprising that she plays to win. Self-deception is not something that she can afford" (xxii).

Because Kate is treated so deplorably by her own family, she garners some sympathy from readers. She befriends Milly only to discover that the latter has met her secret fiancé, Merton Densher on one of his visits as a newsman to the United States. Kate cannot marry the man she loves because her influential aunt objects to his social standing and general lack of money. The clever and unrelenting Kate has been turned away by both her father and her sister when she offered to live with each simply out of a filial feeling for her family. Lionel Croy, her father, has committed some unspecified crime which has left him out of favors with Aunt Maud, who will only allow Kate to live with her if she renounces any contact with her father and sister, the latter now destitute on account of a bad marriage. Both selfishly push her away in the hopes that Aunt Maud will help Kate achieve a great marriage, and she will then be able to bring them back some of the spoils.

Maud devises the scheme to introduce Milly to Merton, under the assumption that he will fall in love with her, leaving Kate free to marry Lord Mark, who has no money

but belongs to the nobility, a trait valued by Maud, who has money but no titles. When Kate adduces, from very little evidence, that Milly is probably dying from a terminal illness, the former gives Maud's plot her own twist: that Merton should marry Milly first, and then return to her, now richer and able to free them both from the designs of Aunt Maud.

Throughout this complicated story, James weaves an intricate plot around the psychological forces that engulf the major characters. One such strand is Kate's attempts to present her scheme in the most innocuous terms to Densher, who is generally passive and as mesmerized by Kate as Ransom was by Verena. But, in keeping with her healthy-minded character, she does in fact believe that she can benefit all involved, as Smith points out, "Milly will . . . fall in love with Densher, Kate believes, and want to marry him, which will result in Densher inheriting a fortune. By exploiting the dying girl's desperate wish to find love, Kate will escape her aunt's and Lord Mark's clutches."

But the exploitative aspect of this plot will be clearly perceived by the audience and by other figures in the novel, especially Densher, but not by Kate herself, who while aware that others will see it that way, does not see it that way herself. Rather, Kate "will have it all: the man she loves as her husband, Milly's money, and her own freedom of action" (xxvii). If Milly were to never find out about the plot, she would simply have left this earth the better for it, having had the experience of Densher in her life, as someone who fulfilled her need for attention. Even if she had guessed the truth, it would not matter: "'She never wanted the truth' – Kate had a high headshake. 'She wanted *you*. She would have taken from you what you could give her and been glad of it, even if she had known it false.'" The reason is that Milly, according to her, would have understood

the feelings behind the lying as well intentioned: “You might have lied to her from pity, and she have seen you and felt you lie, and yet – since it was all for tenderness – she would have thanked you and blessed you and clung to you all the more. For that was your strength, my dear man – that she loves you with passion” (440).

It is not that Kate really cares about Milly, as much as she is convinced that her plan benefits all involved, and a great deal of the subtlety in the novel revolves around her attempting to circumvent the unpleasantness of the situation. Her interpretation in this passage assumes that Milly would have the same positive view of the matter that she does, and she is really incapable of seeing beyond it. When Densher objects that she is sacrificing him, she retorts, “I *shan't* sacrifice you. Don't cry out till you're hurt. I shall sacrifice no one and nobody, and that's just my situation, that I want and that I shall try for everything. That' . . . is how I see myself” (70).

Milly, in contrast, becomes the victim of her own morbid impressions throughout the novel. As Boudreau notes, the nature of her illness is never clarified in the text, either by the doctor or the narrative. This leaves open doubts as to the nature of her death: “does she die because she has been suffering from a fatal disease, or because she loses her desire to live? Would she have lived if she could, or could she have lived if she would?” (120). Every time she meets with her doctor, she leaves with the impression that her health is worsening, although that does not seem to be the case (Boudreau 120). Her great disappointment comes when Lord Mark reveals to her that she has been duped by Merton Densher, who in turn refuses to deny the allegation, showing that he was never entirely convinced of the validity of Kate's ideas. Or, as Kate comes to suspect, it could be that he has fallen in love with her memory.

Milly's death, rather than culminate in the success that Kate expected, has the effect of a symbolic victory that forces Merton and Kate to confront the difficulty that Kate had so diligently worked to circumvent. Because Milly still leaves them the money, knowing the truth, along with a letter that Kate throws in the fire after Merton chooses not to open it, indicating how her purity has now engulfed them in a sea of doubts. It was Kate who initially gave her the nickname of the dove in a pivotal scene in which Milly, all alone with Kate and feeling the absence of her companion Suzie, "felt herself alone with a creature who paced like a panther. That was a violent image, but it made her a little less ashamed of having been scared" (212). But, Milly, nonetheless, gives in to her overtures of friendship, when Kate refers to her as a dove. This name resonates with Milly, who takes it on as a new identity that perfectly seems to define her personality and the effect she has on others. She reflects on the "dovelike" and thought of how "She should have to be clear as to how a dove would act" (213).

When Densher denies that he loved her, Kate replies, "I believe it at least for the time you were there. But your change came – as it may well have – the day you last saw her; she died for you then that you might understand her. From that hour you *did*." Rising, Kate adds, "And I understand now. She did it *for* us'." Just as Verena becomes like Jesus on account of her purity, the rhythm of the sentence, "She died for you . . ." has a biblical cadence that suggests that Milly is also a Christ-like figure. Kate's epiphany culminates in "I used to call her, in my stupidity – for want of anything better – a dove. Well, she stretched out her wings and, and it was to *that* they reached. They cover us" (491). Concerning the significance of this scene, Hutchinson notes that image of the dove, "once solid enough to contain Milly, has become unstable. In the same way that

Milly's wings reach further than Kate ever imagined, so the image of the wings of the dove escapes Kate's control. It no longer implies the passivity of the original conception." The wings have now become "an enfolding, angelic figure or a sinister, suffocating form. Their meaning is ambiguous and therefore full of power" (133). This interpretation suggests, as have many sympathetic critics, that the limits of the laboratory-brain have been surpassed.

*The Golden Bowl*, however, reverses this result in a suggestive way. It is clear that Maggie Verver is a healthy-minded character who represents innocence, along with her father whose biblical name, Adam, also hints at. Early in the novel Prince Amerigo explains to Mrs Assingham, who compares the prince to Machiavelli, how his Catholic, Italian "moral sense" differs from her Anglo-American one. "I've of course something that in our poor dear backward old Rome sufficiently passes for it. But it's no more like yours than the tortuous stone staircase – half-ruined into the bargain! – in some castle of our *quattrocento* is like the 'lightning elevator' in one of Mr. Verver's fifteen-storey buildings." Once again alluding to the progress represented by Protestant culture, he continues, "Your moral sense works by steam – it sends you up like a rocket. Ours is slow and steep and unlighted, with so many steps missing that – well, that it's as short in almost any case to turn round and come down again" (47).

Lewis sees in this passage a typical stereotype of Italians that Protestants perceive, as the prince has in his lineage "an infamous Pope and at least one Cardinal," suggesting the questionable moral sense of European, Catholic culture, "a theme that underlies much of James's writing, which often shows how right-thinking Protestants, especially Americans . . . learn to see their own apparently straightforward ethical beliefs

as failing to account for the complexities that can be discerned on the tortuous staircases of Catholic Europe” (54). He further discerns in this passage an allusion to William James’s typology: “The elder James describes Lutheran and Calvinist theology as faiths that appeal to ‘sick souls,’ and Catholicism, by contrast, as ‘healthy minded’” (54).

As in the previous works, James uses the types to motivate important aspects of the action. The novel opens with the prince who has agreed to marry into the extremely wealthy Verver family; the lawyers have worked out the details, making him wealthy now as well. Fanny Assingham, he credits with providing the proper introductions and helping him to better understand the ways of a culture he does not fully understand, although he has committed himself to living by its standards. At Fanny’s, he runs into Charlotte Stant, the woman he probably would have married if she were not poor, since she is an American who has lived in Italy and speaks the language fluently. They had a passionate affair previously, and now she is in town for her friend’s Maggie’s wedding. Bob and Fanny Assingham discuss the moral dilemma posed by her presence, since Maggie does not know about their past intimacy. Fanny makes it clear that all who know Maggie realize that there are things she cannot be told, and so people avoid telling her, as do both Charlotte and the prince: “‘She’d be so frightened. She’d be, in her strange little way, so hurt. She wasn’t born to know evil. She must never know it.’” (82).

This circumstance combines with the intensification of Maggie’s relationship with her father after the marriage takes place to induce the former lovers to rekindle their romance. During this time, Charlotte also marries Adam, but since daughter and father prefer to spend their time together, the respective spouses are thrust together, attending public functions that Adam cannot attend supposedly on account of his health.

A most interesting feature of this plot is the way in which it alludes to the plot of the previous novel; as Lewis notes, “*The Golden Bowl* recapitulates many of the themes of the *Wings of the Dove*, but always in a slightly different key.” An important parallel in both novels “suggest[s] the possibility, which eventually occurs even to Maggie, that Charlotte herself planned Amerigo’s marriage to Maggie, in much the same way that Kate Croy plans to have Merton Densher Marry Milly” (56). This creates a meaningful comparison in which the two characters in the later novel appear as if their plot were to begin “only after the plot [from the previous novel] had succeeded.” The parallel is further hinted at in a scene in which Maggie brings Charlotte the first volume of a novel of which she has only brought the first. Unlike other characters, Maggie chooses to re-write the ending of the novel by requesting that her father go back to America. Rather than becoming a sick soul, she reacts by accepting that evil exists and dealing with the result in a way that allows her to reconstitute her marriage.

Characters such as Mrs Burrage, Kate Croy, and all of the characters in the final novel represent a healthy-minded attitude that isolates evil and attempts to deal with it in a rational way. If Kate Croy fails to achieve her goals, she remains a sufficiently likeable character to keep the matter open for further thought. The inconclusiveness of his later novels suggests that Henry James remains as incapable of overcoming the basic Jamesian tension as his brother. But James deals with it from a different perspective, one that sheds light on everyday human dilemmas.

## Epilogue: The Pagan Imagination in Santayana<sup>57</sup>

Santayana's thought resists simple paraphrase or succinct summary and is best described through four basic interrelated themes: imagination, knowledge as symbolic in nature, ideals, and disillusion: these remain fairly constant and central for Santayana throughout his long life and career as a philosopher, essayist, and poet. The imagination as the motive-force of all thinking generates ideas, some about the world, in keeping with differing standards of appropriateness. As in Wittgenstein, for Santayana socially established norms serve to demarcate science from other intellectual endeavors such as poetry. Santayana also allows for the poetic imagination to develop meaningful assertions about the world of human actions, going beyond such norms, without, however, being allowed to compete with science, as representing legitimate beliefs about the world of material reality. Consequently, Santayana's view resembles Wittgenstein's, but also goes beyond it.<sup>58</sup>

Imagination for Santayana also crucially involves what today would be more readily identifiable as empathy. In this aspect, it strongly resembles Martha Nussbaum's description of it in "The Narrative Imagination."<sup>59</sup> Santayana's account of imagination generally links with his conviction that all knowledge is symbolic, and never literal; ideas only allude to the real world of external objects and persons, but can never succeed in definitively characterizing them. Consequently, the notion that every religious tradition offers some insight into how human beings may relate to the natural world becomes attainable.

---

<sup>57</sup> The contents of this chapter have been modified from an upcoming article, "Paganism in William James and George Santayana" in *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society*.

<sup>58</sup> For a comparison of the views of Santayana and Wittgenstein on science and religion see Hodges and Lachs (70-86).

<sup>59</sup> Her description of imagination and empathy, if not her politics generally, resembles Santayana's: "Marcus Aurelius insisted that to become world citizens we must not simply amass knowledge; we must also cultivate in ourselves a capacity for sympathetic imagination that will enable us to comprehend the motives and choices of people different from ourselves, seeing them not as forbiddingly alien and other, but as sharing many problems and possibilities with us" ("Narrative Imagination" 85).

The claim that all knowledge is symbolic means that thinking takes place in accordance with some set of ideals that serve to organize reality in specific ways. These are not to be understood as real objects of existence, but as mental creations. Rooted in and relatable to experience, they serve to guide human endeavors. Hence, the statement “everything natural has an ideal completion, and everything ideal a natural ground” (84) can be allowed to stand as a brief statement of Santayana’s philosophy.<sup>60</sup> Disillusion should constrain the imagination’s proclivity to creating illusions by urging the withdrawal of all metaphysical or religious claims to explaining how anything comes in or out of existence, a function only the sciences succeed in doing.

Santayana’s disillusion has its origins in the presocratic philosopher Democritus, whose nickname was “the laughing philosopher.” It differs greatly from its modern-day counterpart. Santayana argues that his version constitutes the most genuine kind of materialism, and that when unalloyed with other perspectives, remains in its essence, a philosophy that need not minimize the suffering of this world in order to achieve a *modus vivendi* with it. Unfortunately, materialism after Darwinism has become pessimistic in ways that contradict its original impetus as a philosophy of life.

Santayana’s clearest depiction of materialism and its relation to religion is to be found in first edition of *The Life of Reason*.<sup>61</sup> The genuine materialist cannot subscribe to the shallow superficialities of the once-born, healthy-minded type. Rather, the ethics of materialism partakes

---

<sup>60</sup> Hodges and Lachs contend that Santayana’s *The Life of Reason* could be characterized in this fashion. That Santayana, however, would later replace the ideal by his more technical analyses of essences does not significantly alter the validity of extending its scope to include his philosophy as a whole.

<sup>61</sup> The original five volume work was later edited into a single book edition, which was highly abridged, cutting out many of the passages on materialism that most obviously allude to William James’s typology. The best edition to read is the 1922 five volume reissue because it includes a new introductory essay of great significance.

of a “merciful system” that logically leads to asceticism as the best response to the disappointments and despairs that often accompany human beings’ greatest plans and intentions: “Contempt for mortal sorrows is reserved for those who drive with hosannas the Juggernaut car of absolute optimism” (5:90). All religions have always included an aspect of illusion that needs to be overcome, however, and the best anecdote to this failing is laughter: “But against evils born of pure vanity and self-deception, against the verbiage by which man persuades himself that he is the goal and acme of the universe, laughter is the proper defence” (5:90-91). Such laughter possesses the “subtle advantage, that it need not remain without an overtone of sympathy and brotherly understanding; as the laughter that greets Don Quixote’s absurdities and misadventures does not mock the hero’s intent” (5:91).

Modern materialists generally ignore the insights of the early Greeks, “Oblivious of Democritus, the unwilling materialists of our day have generally been awkwardly intellectual and quite incapable of laughter. If they have felt anything, they have felt melancholy” (5:91). This melancholy originates from considering the negative predictions of modern science that the world will eventually end and from focusing exclusively on the outer, mechanical aspects of the material world. Santayana does not believe that these considerations rely on accurate portrayals of the human condition: “What matters then is quality. The reasonable and humane demand to make of the world is that such creatures as exist should not be unhappy and that life, whatever its quantity, should have a quality that may justify it in its own eyes.” The worst predictions made by science have no theoretical solution, and must simply be understood and accommodated to our lives in as reasonable manner as possible (5:94).

In contradistinction to James, Santayana, in his “Introduction” to *Interpretations* argues that the core of religious thought will forever remain inaccessible to science, for it originates as a

unique kind of interpretation that isolates it from other kinds of experience: “religion and poetry are identical in essence, and differ merely in the way in which they are attached to practical affairs. Poetry is called religion when it intervenes in life and religion, when it merely supervenes upon life, is seen to be nothing but poetry” (3). By eliminating spurious claims about the world, religions could avoid sectarian tensions as well as the conflict with science. The attempt to resolve the latter can only result in impoverishing the imaginative life associated with religious ideas: “Mythology cannot become science by being reduced in bulk, but it may cease, as a mythology, to be worth having” (4).

Santayana’s understanding of paganism’s decline from a once vibrant religion to a mere collection of quaint fables, which he attributes to a loss of its imaginative vitality, becomes an implicit critique of contemporary, liberal Protestantism. In the chapter “The Dissolution of Paganism,” Santayana observes that: “In the Gospels . . . we sometimes find the kingdom of heaven illustrated by principles drawn from observation of this world rather than from an ideal conception of justice; as when we hear that to him that hath shall be given an from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.” He adds that these kinds of statements, by their allusion to the world of familiar events, “remind us that the God we are seeking is present and active, that he is the living God.” Moments such as these become intermingled with the otherwise mysterious world of religion and myth and remain essential for sustaining the religious sensibility of a people, one that can be easily disrupted by attempts to convert them into rational formulas. An experiential connection “with the forces of Nature, or the passions or conscience of man, or (if it must come to that) with written laws or visible images” tethers “religious objects” to material reality in a way that ensures their relevance for people’s lives (55).

Hence, the later, more enlightened Hellenistic philosophies of Stoicism and Epicureanism remained within the limited purview of elites and failed to ever appeal to the majority of people precisely because they explained away these seemingly irrational elements of paganism. Paradoxically, then, it was the more fantastic and least tenable aspects of early pagan ideas that made them most relevant to people's lives. Santayana retraces the steps of this historical process, beginning with illusion, moving to disillusion, and finally despair – the latter, however, can be avoided through a more thorough naturalistic interpretation. Assuming that the earlier beliefs were actually symbolic representations, essentially poetic in nature, a disillusioned religion could in principle retain its imaginative content by relinquishing its ontological claim to directly representing the world as it actually exists. Its moral force, in terms of privileging some options over others, Santayana believes, could also continue to be effective, however, as one need not accept the supernatural origin of the Ten Commandments in order to acknowledge their power as ideals for humanity to abide by.

Essential links between the creative imaginings of religious thinking with material and human reality can be established in a variety of ways, which serve to delimit the kinds of actions that the pagan gods were capable of performing. It is not arbitrary, for instance, that Zeus should exhibit an erratic temper as part of his character, for he was associated with the power of thunder, which may occur at a moment's notice, and his moral character needed to reflect his natural element for the deity to remain believable. When these kinds of connections to the natural world are severed, they may be replaced by moral ones, as for example, in the famous story of Persephone. Swallowed up by the earth and taken down to Hades, Persephone is missed by her mother, the goddess of agriculture Demeter, who as a result "conceals her divinity, refuses the fruits of the earth, and wanders about in the guise of an old woman, nursing her grief, until at last

Zeus sends his messenger to Hades to effect a compromise.” The dénouement that Persephone will be allowed to remain with her mother for two thirds of the year, as long as she returns to her husband for the remainder generates “a prototype of human affection” (37). Mothers, daughters, and new husbands now have an exemplar of imperfect, yet necessary compromise. Analyses of this kind that focus on the symbolic nature of religious ideas allow us to glimpse the religious pathos of paganism at work in its heyday.

Santayana’s position is brilliant in exposition and relevant for contemporary discussions of religious issues. Decades before it became popular to do so, Santayana urges scholars to avoid presentist assumptions: “We study the past as a dead object, as a ruin, not as an authority and as an experiment” (Interpretations 170). And this hampers “any true apprehension of that element in the past which was vital and which remains eternal” (Interpretations 171).

Consequently, Santayana is able to deploy his interpretation as a preemptive objection to the kind of analysis that James will be producing in *Varieties*, for Santayana subtly suggests that the historical pattern exemplified by pagan religion is being repeated in Protestantism’s attempt to privilege the scientific over the poetic in religious interpretations. In the first volume of *The Life of Reason*, he exclaims that “Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness,” shortly afterward adding his now famous apothegm, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (1:284).

One lesson that Santayana thinks the history of pagan religion teaches is that submitting myths and religious beliefs to critical analysis cannot strengthen them, but can only diminish their utility. Consequently, James’s project is flawed inasmuch as his goal is to preserve or extend the reach of the religious sensibility. In an analysis that lends support to this view, David A. Hollinger argues that *Varieties* represents a transitional work in which James is moving

towards the view that “Protestantism [is] a historic vehicle within rather than outside the discursive constraints of modern science, once those constraints were properly understood” (10). This result comes at a costly price: “He worked from both ends simultaneously, making science more commodious and religion less confined by anything that might conflict with any specific finding of science” (28). Hence, Santayana would add, we end up with a religion that still fails to fulfill its mission of organizing experience by speaking to the heart, and a science that seizes to be intellectually convincing by weakening its rigorous standards.

Arguably, it is Santayana’s Catholicism that enables him to look to paganism with “an auspicious eye,” and James’s Protestantism that makes him look to it with “a dropping eye.” For Santayana “Catholicism had more mythic power than Protestantism, especially in its puritan ascetic form. Also, the Catholic deity is more forgivingly ‘human’ than the Protestant one. Finally, Catholicism fosters the belief in the sacredness of nature and divine immanence whereas puritanism treats nature as a fallen, depraved world” (Russo 24). As Santayana sees it, Catholicism and paganism form one continuous narrative: “All religions and moralities seem to me forms of paganism; only that in ages of ripe experience or of decadence they become penitential and subjective” (Santayana 134). James orders the chapters of his presentation in keeping with “the evangelical Protestant conversion narrative” by “moving from ‘healthy-mindedness’ to the ‘sick soul’ to the ‘divided self’ to ‘conversion’ and then to ‘saintliness,’” a move in keeping with his desire to “present the core of religion in general as having been most attractively manifest in exactly the cultural tradition to which James’s listeners and readers were directly heir” (Hollinger 13, 14). James must have felt a great sense of triumph as: “The Gifford Lectures attracted larger audiences on each subsequent occasion and earned James worldwide

acclaim. Their publication under the title *The Varieties of Religious Experience* attracted new readers to James's work" (Mcquade 9: xli). Yet, on this view, he was preaching to the converted.

Privileging the personal and individual, James analyzes specific reports of the putative religious experience of mystics, saints, poets, and philosophers, ranging from Marcus Aurelius to Saint Teresa, from Goethe to Emerson. A difficulty for this perspective: how do these reports represent empirical evidence on the par with that produced by other sciences? James addresses the problem by developing an innovative methodology to circumscribe his topic. For James, the most intense form experienced by those deemed the most religious becomes the standard-bearer, the criteria by which to judge all similar occurrences in common people. This focus on the extreme case he compares to a scalpel or microscope of the scientist (*Varieties* 31), which allows the researcher to isolate the significant part of a phenomenon.

Since for James the morbid-minded is a superior type to the healthy-minded because the former experience most intensely the sense of evil in the world. Marcus Aurelius is deemed of less religious significance than the author of *Theologia Germanica*, an anonymous Christian text from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, because although both belong within the morbid type, the latter is the most intensely enthusiastic about his views. Aurelius believes that we should welcome whatever comes our way, "because it leads to this, the health of the universe and to the prosperity and felicity of Zeus. For he would not have brought on any man what he has brought, if it were not useful for the whole." The author of *Germanica*, after having acknowledged the pains and tribulations of our earthly existence, explains the change in the man who has been touched by God: "he is made a partaker of all manner of joy, bliss, peace, rest and consolation, and so the man is henceforth in the kingdom of heaven." Citing these sources at greater length, James reacts to the telling difference in tone: "How much more active and positive the impulse of the

Christian writer to accept his place in the universe is! Marcus Aurelius agrees *to* the scheme – the German theologian agrees *with* it” (48).

Given James’s methodological assumptions, the Greeks come to represent weak versions of either the healthy-minded or the morbid:

The early Greeks are continually held up to us in literary works as models of the healthy-minded joyousness among the Greeks – Homer’s flow of enthusiasm for most things that the sun shines upon is steady. But even in Homer the reflective passages are cheerless, and the moment the Greeks grew systematically pensive and thought of ultimates, they became unmitigated pessimists. (131)

James never revisited or altered his view of paganism in any way. The Epicureans and Stoics represent the “cold” and the “quite cold” respectively. They belong to the low-end of the twice-born spectrum, “the highest flight of what twice-born religion would call the purely natural man” (132). For James, these types remain in existence, but only as the tepid ones of the Christian religion. James ignores the whole Golden Age of Athens in his account, concentrating on the extremes of Homer and Aurelius, one must assume because they did not report any experience that James would deem an extreme case..

James does not cite Santayana in *Varieties* but clearly had him in mind in his paganism passages – never more so, however, than in his observations about Walt Whitman. Contrary to anything found in the Greeks, here we find the paragon of healthy-mindedness. Santayana had been unfairly critical of Whitman and Browning, in his chapter “The Poetry of Barbarism.” Santayana unsuccessfully attempted to present them as inferior to his pagan models in their comprehension of reality and portrayal of ideals, a position that came across as unfair and priggish, something that Santayana eventually came to admit as a flaw of his presentation. The stanzas in question come from “Song of Myself”:

I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid  
 and self-contained,  
 I stand and look at them long and long;  
 They do not sweat and whine about their condition.  
 They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins.  
 Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania  
 of owning things,  
 Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived  
 thousands of years ago,  
 Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth. (85)

James had prefaced this section by the observation that “pagan” had come to mean either pertaining to the Greeks and Romans’ religious sensibilities or to “the mere natural animal man without a sense of sin” (84). In an odd contrast that makes most sense when considered in the light of Santayana’s book, James goes on to cite Homer’s poignant description of Achilles’ killing by decapitation of the young, Lycaon. James laments the lack of a sense of sin in these actions or the “ingenious” attempt of later generations to find some good at work in current evils. When Lycaon’s brother decries these actions, he is merely told that such realities are simply a part of life (85-86).

James finds it appalling that the Greeks failed to ever achieve Whitman’s level of optimism: they would have found “What is called good is perfect and what is called bad is just as perfect” repelling. Alluding most explicitly to Santayana, James denies that the Greeks “invent ‘another and a better world’ of the imagination, in which, along with the ills, the innocent goods of sense would also find no place.” Instead, they remain trapped within the realm of simple instinctive reactions, which “gives a pathetic dignity to ancient pagan feeling,” one totally lacking in Whitman, who in some ways achieves inclusion in “the genuine lineage of the

prophets” (86). James seizes on Santayana’s excess in his presentation of Whitman to defend his mostly pejorative use of the term pagan.<sup>62</sup>

The philosophical novel, *The Last Puritan* features Oliver Alden as the last puritan in a logical rather than temporal sense, i.e., he represents Puritanism in its most extreme form. Oliver has the opportunity to interact with characters that represent “varieties of religious imaginations,” a phrase that Santayana himself used to describe James’s *Varieties*. Santayana’s novel resembles a Henry James novel in that it contains a great deal of dialogue, but opens with a prologue and closes with an epilogue both of which feature Mario and Santayana discussing the life of Oliver. Mario, a distant Italian cousin of the main character, asks Santayana to write the story of the now deceased Oliver, and both Santayana and Mario appear as characters in the novel.

Rather than simply showing readers the limitations of a Puritan character, as does Fitzgerald in making Nick Carraway a narrator who is prevented from becoming truly engaged with those around him by an internal code that impedes him, Santayana provides a history of Oliver’s family, beginning with the grandfather, in order to imaginatively portray the development of such a personality. In actuality, Oliver has a natural curiosity and never fails to consider each new option that presents itself to him, but he always finds each lacking in logical consistency and incapable of becoming a way of life.

---

<sup>62</sup> For a brief history of the controversies generated by the issue of Santayana’s early and subsequent interpretations of Whitman, see Porte.

## Works Cited

- Armstrong, Paul B. *The Phenomenology of Henry James*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1983.
- Arnett, Willard E. "Ultimate Disillusion and Philosophic Truth." *Revue internationale de philosophie*. 17 (1963) : 5-17.
- Ashmore, Jerome. *Santayana, Art, and Aesthetics*. Cleveland: P of Western Reserve U, 1966.
- Boudreau, Kristin. *Henry James' Narrative Technique: Consciousness, Perception, and Cognition*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Barrett, William. *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy*. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1962
- Byatt, A.S. Introduction. *The Bostonians*. By Henry James. Notes by Pierre A. Walker. New York: Modern Library, 2003.
- Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy*. New York: Random House, 1967.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Ed. and Introd. Randal Johnson. New York: Columbia UP, 1993
- Bruner, Jerome. "James's *Varieties* and the 'New' Constructivism." Proudfoot 73-85.
- Critchley, Simon, and William R. Schroeder. Introduction. *A Companion to Continental Philosophy*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1999. I
- Crowell, Steven, "Existentialism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2010 Edition)*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Web. 24 February 2012.
- Double, Richard. *Metaphilosophy and Free Will*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.
- Edel, Leon. *Henry James*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1963. Pamphlets on American Authors 4.
- Ede, James M. *William James and Phenomenology*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.
- Evans, Rand B. and Gerald E. Myers. Introduction. *Principles of Psychology Volume 1*. Ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1981. The Works of William James vol 8.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. 1925. New York: Scribner, 2004.

- Forrer, Richard. "The Puritan Religious Dilemma: The Ethical Dimensions of God's Sovereignty." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 44.4 (Dec., 1976): 613-628.
- Funkenstein, Amos. "The Polytheism of William James" *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 55.1 (Jan., 1994), pp. 99-111.
- Gale, Richard M. *The Divided Self of William James*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.
- Goodman, Douglas J. Introduction. *The Blackwell Companion to Major Classical Social Theorists*. Ed. Ritzer, George. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003.
- Graybosch, A. Rev. of *Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life*, by Henry S. Levinson. 13 Aug 2007: 26: 321–329 *Metaphilosophy*. Web. 22 Feb. 2012.
- Hadas, Moses. Introduction *Ten Plays by Euripides*. Trans. Moses Hadas and John Mclean Toronto: Bantam Books, 1981.
- Hodges, Michael P, and John Lachs. *Thinking in the Ruins: Wittgenstein and Santayana on Contingency*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2000.
- Hollinger, David. "Damned for God's Glory." Proodfoot 9-30.
- Holzberger, William G. Introduction. *The Complete Poems of George Santayana: A Critical Edition*. By George Santayana Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1979.
- Husserl, Edmund. Trans. and itnrod. Quentin Lauer *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: "Philosophy As a Rigorous Science," and "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man."* New York: Harper & Row, 1965.
- Hutchison, Hazel. *Seeing and Believing: Henry James and the Spiritual World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- James, Henry. *The Ambassadors*. Ed. and Introd. Harry Levin. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.
- . "The Art of Fiction." *The American Tradition in Literature*. 12<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. George Perkins and Barbara Perkins. Vol 2. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009 469-83
- . *The Bostonians*. 1885. Inrod. Alison Lurie. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.
- . *The Golden Bowl*. Introduction and Notes by Ruth B. Yeazell. London: Penguin, 2009.
- . "Is There Life After Death?" *Henry James on Culture: Collected Essays on Politics and the American Social Scene*. Ed. Pierre A. Walker. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1999. 115-27.

- . *Notes of a Son and Brother, and the Middle Years: A Critical Edition*. Ed. Peter Collister. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2011.
- . *The Tragic Muse*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co, 1890.
- . *The Wings of the Dove*. 1902. Introd. and ed. Bruce L.R. Smith. New York: Barnes and Noble, 2005.
- James, William, *The Correspondence of William James*. Ed. Ignas K. Skrupskelis, Elizabeth M. Berkeley, and Henry James. 12 vols. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1992.
- , Introd. and ed. *The Literary Remains of Henry James*. By Henry James Sr. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Literature House, 1970.
- . James, William. "Is Life Worth Living?" *Essays on Faith and Morals*. Ralph B. Perry. New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1943. 1-31.
- . *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Introduction and Notes by Wayne Proudfoot. Barnes New York: Nobles Classics, 2004.
- . "The Will to Believe." *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*. Introduction. Eds. John J. McDermott New York: Random House, 1967. 717-34.
- Kaplan, Fred. *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius: a Biography*. New York: Morrow, 1992.
- Kuklick, Bruce. *The Rise of American Philosophy, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1977.
- Lears, T. J. Jackson. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*. New York : Pantheon Books, 1981
- Levin, Jonathan. *The poetics of transition : Emerson, pragmatism, & American literary Modernism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1999.
- Levinson, Henry S. *The Religious Investigations of William James*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1981.
- . *Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1992.
- Lewis, Pericles. *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2010.

- Lyon, Richard Colton. Introduction. *Santayana on America: Essays, Notes, and Letters on American Life, Literature, and Philosophy*. By George Santayana. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968.
- McCormick, John. *George Santayana: A Biography*. New York: Knopf, 1987.
- Moreno, Daniel. *Santayana Filósofo: La Filosofía como Forma de Vida*. [Santayana *Philosopher: Philosophy as a Form of Life*]. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2007.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1997.
- Pawelski, James O. *The Dynamic Individualism of William James*. Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 2007.
- Pihlström, Sami. *The Trail of the Human Serpent Is Over Everything: Jamesian Perspectives on Mind, World, and Religion*. Lanham: UP of America, 2008.
- Porte, Joel. Introduction. *The birth of reason & other essays*. By George Santayana. Ed. Daniel Cory. New York, Columbia UP, 1968.
- Proudfoot, Wayne. *William James and a Science of Religions: Reexperiencing the Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Columbia UP, 2004.
- - -. *Religious Experience*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985.
- Ratner, Joseph. "George Santayana's Theory of Religion." *The Journal of Religion* 3.5 (Sep., 1923): 458-475
- Reichenbach, Hans. *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1951
- Reinhardt, Kurt F. *The Theological Novel of Modern Europe: An Analysis of Masterpieces by Eight Authors*. New York: Frederick Publishing Co., 1969.
- Richardson, Robert D. *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism: a Biography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.
- Rorty, Richard. "Some Inconsistencies in James's *Varieties*." Proudfoot 86-97.
- Russo, John Paul. "Oliver and Mario: The Choice of Italy in George Santayana's Novel of Exile." *Literature D'America: Revista Tremestrale*. Anno XXV, nn (2005): 108-109.
- Saatkamp, Jr., Herman J. Introduction. *The Birth of Reason and Other Essays*. Ed. Daniel Cory. New York: Columbia UP, 1995.

- Samuels, Charles T. *The Ambiguity of Henry James*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1971.
- Santayana, George. "A Brief History of My Opinions." Lyon 3-20.
- . "Apologia Pro Mente Sua" Schilpp 497-605.
- . "Dewey's Naturalistic Metaphysics." Lyon 109-26.
- . "James's Psychology." Cory 97-107.
- . "A General Confession." Schilpp 3-39.
- . *The Idler and His Works: And Other Essays*. Ed Daniel Cory. New York: G.Braziller, 1957.
- . *Interpretations of poetry and religion*. New York: Harper, 1957.
- . *The Letters of George Santayana*. Ed. William G. Holzberger. 8 vols. Cambridge, Mass: MIT P, 2001
- . *The Last Puritan: A Memoire in the Form of a Novel*. New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1936.
- . *The Life of Reason: Or, the Phases of Human Progress*. New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1922.
- . *The life of Reason; or, The Phases of Human Progress*. One-volume ed. Rev. by the author in collaboration with Daniel Cory. New York: Scribner, 1954.
- . *Persons and Places*. Ed. William G. Holzberger, Herman J. Saatkamp, and Marianne S. Wokeck. *The Works of George Santayana*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1986
- . *The Realms of Being*. New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1942.
- . *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, Goethe*. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1953.
- Schilpp, Paul A., ed. *The Philosophy of George Santayana*. New York: Tudor Pub. Co, 1951.
- Seigfried, Charlene H. *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.
- Taves, Ann. Introduction. *Contemporary Varieties of Religious Experience: James's Classic Study in Light of Resiliency, Temperament, and Trauma*. Bridgers, Lynn Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.
- , *Religious Experience Reconsidered : a Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Taylor, Charles. *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2002.

Tessitore, John. "The 'Sky-Blue' Variety: William James, Walt Whitman, and the Limits of Healthy-Mindedness." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* , 62. 4 (March 2008): 493-526.

Townsend, Kim. *Manhood at Harvard: William James and Others*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996.

*Theologia Germanicus*. Trans. Winkworth Susana, 1893. Web.

Wilshire, Bruce. W. *William James and Phenomenology: a Study of "The Principles of Society"*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1968.

Woodward, Anthony. *Living in the Eternal: A Study of George Santayana*. Nashville, Tenn: Vanderbilt UP, 1988