

**CONTINUITIES OF PRAGMATISM, SETTLING
METAPHYSICAL DISPUTES
AND THE ANALYTIC-CONTINENTAL DIVIDE
Part I**

**ПРЕЕМСТВЕННОСТЬ ПРАГМАТИЗМА,
РАЗРЕШЕНИЕ МЕТАФИЗИЧЕСКИХ СПОРОВ
И АНАЛИТИЧЕСКО-КОНТИНЕНТАЛЬНЫЙ РАСКОЛ
Часть I**

J.E. HACKETT

Savannah State University, Savannah, USA

Дж.Э. ХАКЕТ

Государственный университет Саванны, Саванна, США

Аннотация

Статья посвящена истории прагматизма. В ней утверждается, что классический прагматизм, неопрагматизм и современный прагматизм имеют тематическую преемственность. Эта преемственность может быть в целом охарактеризована как интеграция теории и практики: опыт определяет содержание теории, и деятельность направляет формирование знания. Тезис о преемственности имеет четыре следствия. Прагматисты изучают отношения людей в связи с процессуально-ориентированной и эволюционирующей концепцией природы. Прагматисты отказываются рассматривать убеждения как пропозиции, отображающие независимую от нас и фиксированную реальность; их истинность вытекает из привычек, порожаемых убеждениями. Прагматизм исходит из открытости к возможностям, поскольку наша связь с миром опыта опосредована множеством отдельных интересов, интеллектуальных историй, различных лингвистических и дискурсивных практик. Прагматисты сосредоточены на социальных и политических проблемах, с которыми ежедневно сталкиваются люди. В статье также рассматривается, как Джеймс понимает термин «метафизика» в связи с его утверждением, что прагматизм является методом разрешения «метафизических споров». Экзистенциальный плюрализм Джеймса подразумевает максимизацию возможностей, удовлетворяющих всех в наибольшей степени, не препятствуя и не нанося ущерба чужой способности приобщиться к богатому и новому миру. Автор анализирует подход Тодда Мэя к аналитическо-континентальным противоречиям и заключает, что если эти противоречия разрешать на основе концепции опыта Джеймса, то онтологический плюрализм является наилучшим решением, и эта приверженность к плюрализму подразумевает преодоление тех исключая-

щих практик, которые философски «легитимируются» существующим аналитическо-континентальным противостоянием.

Ключевые слова: прагматизм, Уильям Джеймс, аналитико-континентальное расхождение, метафизика, радикальный эмпиризм, антифундаментализм, опыт, плюрализм, мелиоризм.

Хакет Джеймс Эдвард – доктор философии, преподаватель Государственного университета Саванны, США.

hackettj@savannahstate.edu

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8658-0779>

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J.E. HACKETT

Savannah State University, Savannah, USA

Summary

The article is devoted to the history of pragmatism. It maintains that a thematic continuity runs through the classical pragmatists, neopragmatists, and contemporary pragmatists. This continuity can be vaguely characterized as an integration of theory and practice, but experience gives theory its content such that action is always guiding the formation of knowledge. There are four implications of this continuity. Pragmatists are centrally concerned with the human relationship to a process-oriented and evolving conception of nature. For pragmatists, our beliefs are regarded not as propositions that map onto a separate and fixed reality, but instead their truth emerges out of the habits beliefs generate. Pragmatism emphasizes an openness to possibility since our access to the world of experience is mediated by a variety of selective interests, intellectual histories, varying linguistic and discursive practices. Pragmatists are deeply concerned with the social and political problems that confront us on a daily basis. The author also examines the manner in which James understands the term “metaphysics” given that pragmatism is a method for settling “metaphysical disputes.” Jamesian existential pluralism implies to maximize all possibilities that can satisfy everyone as much as possible without impeding and harming an-

other's capacity to experience a rich and novel world. The author analyzes Todd May's approach to the analytic-continental divide and concludes that if settlement embraces James's thick conception of experience, then the resulting ontological pluralism is the best settlement possible, and this commitment to pluralism requires dissolving the exclusionary practices the analytic-continental divide suggests philosophically.

Keywords: pragmatism, William James, analytic-continental divide, metaphysics, radical empiricism, anti-foundationalism, experience, pluralism, meliorism.

Hackett, James Edward – Ph.D. in Philosophy, Lecturer at Savannah State University, USA.

hackettj@savannahstate.edu

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8658-0779>

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Introduction

In the following essay, I was asked two questions posed to me by the Organizing Committee of the “150 Years of Pragmatism” Conference held by the Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences. Given my answers, I decided to unite them thematically.

First question: Much of contemporary pragmatism looks very different from the original version. Is there any continuity in American pragmatism's progress from its early days to the present time? What does the history of pragmatism teach us?

Second question: William James understood pragmatism as “primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes”. What positive role, if any, could pragmatists play in “settling” current analytical-continental controversy?

First, I answer – yes, however, narrow – there is some unifying thread in both classical, neopragmatists, and contemporary pragmatists (1). I propose that below. Next, I answer exactly how I understand pragmatism as a method for settling the analytic and Continental Divide by first highlighting how James understood metaphysics and how this understanding fueled his development of pragmatism as a method for settling disputes. Finally, through Jamesian pragmatism, I argue against the existence of the Analytic-Continental Divide, and show how a Jamesian would agree with Todd May on this issue.

1.1 Contextualization of Pragmatic Continuities

We should understand pragmatism historically as an evolving concern with the fact that action guides theoretical inquiry, and anytime philosophers forget that, our conceptual speculations become rigid, uncompromising, and fail. This maxim is the heart and soul of at least one pragmatist, William James, whose philosophy I have been diligently pursuing from graduate school and onward with great interest. However, it's still somewhat true in varying degrees with Rorty, Sellars as much as Dewey and Pierce. So when you ask if there is any *continuity*, I claim that pragmatism is the history of a sustained disagreement *about exactly how action guides inquiry*, but that's what I take most poignantly to hold for the classical pragmatists, and the 20th and 21st century pragmatists. I have found this maxim understood differently and widespread, but the core concern still remains.

If you wanted to press me further, then I would say that American pragmatism from the classical to the contemporary is that moment when action and knowledge are so fully integrated to the point that philosophy rejoins the cultural spaces from which the 17th century Cartesian to the 19th century German idealist would find objectionable. Philosophy, then, concerns itself with practical consequences of belief. In other words, pragmatic philosophy becomes concerned with concrete experience. United in rejecting Cartesianism and other foundational philosophical systems, every pragmatist would agree that philosophy does not start in universal doubt and arrive at some privileged, presuppositionless and context-free starting point to philosophize. In fact, such Archimedian points cannot be reached! In the modern period, these same presuppositionless starting points quested after certainty and established truths. Established and timeless truths, on the contrary, are idealizations of temporary truth in our concrete lives. The idealizations of temporary truth are but moments of theoretical confidence for the pragmatist.

As I see it, there are four main implications of the integration of knowledge and action (theory and practice) that we can outline as thematic continuities to which most pragmatists agree from the classical sources into the 21st century.

1.2 Four Thematic Continuities of American Pragmatism

First, pragmatists are centrally concerned with the human relationship to nature, and this usually means a process-oriented view of nature. This process-oriented view regards nature as evolving rather

than a static and teleological world. Given this proclivity, pragmatists ask: What is the place of the human being in such a world? Does God exist with that conception of nature in mind or not? Classical pragmatists do not shy away from Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory and in fact, many pragmatists, like Dewey and Quine, urge us to accept naturalism. This acceptance of evolution mostly means that pragmatists are naturalists of some variety. If God exists in their system at all, then there's some experiential aspect that pragmatists might call God, but such conceptions are usually unorthodox solutions to reconcile divinity with nature. In other ways, however, this means that metaphysics of meaning almost always stress the causal processes of an evolving natural world of possibility and change over and against metaphysical formalist systems of medieval scholasticism, 17th century rationalisms up to and including German idealisms. For the pragmatist, philosophical system building is fine if those building the system of thought treat their claims as best guesses and are open to the possibility of their falsification and revisability.

Second, whatever our place in the world and whatever our thoughts regarding these concerns, experience provides the criteria for belief and our beliefs are regarded not as propositions that map onto reality. Instead, their truth emerges out of the habits beliefs generate. Beliefs can be experimental for the pragmatist and theoretical construction is continually open for revision. In this way, philosophical beliefs are treated more as scientific hypotheses than a dogmatism waiting to happen, and this is why pragmatism is often regarded as a method in assessing beliefs rather than thinking philosophy to be the history of intractable debates about varying epistemic, metaphysical and ethical problems. Pragmatists are thus fallibilists. For this reason, our beliefs are connected and emerges in contexts of lived-experience. We adjust them to our existential and pragmatic needs within the boundaries of experience, and when pragmatists speak about lived-experience, especially William James, they tend to resemble existential phenomenologists making room to talk about and engage the content and structure of experience from which our beliefs stem. Likewise, pragmatists adopt the same anti-foundationalism as their existentialist brothers and sisters.

No matter the pragmatist, however, they always have a full-fledged system of thick experience that fleshes out their epistemological and metaphysical commitments that respect and delineate the centrality of experience (e.g., James's conceivable effect claim or Dewey's

adjustment of the organism to its environment). This is why action and knowledge are integrated and important deceptive but classical philosophical distinctions are avoided such as mind and world, subject and object, and fact and value to name a few. Experience is always central (even if another word plays the same role in the pragmatist at hand) and in every instance, the integration of mind and world suggests an overcoming of the subject and object. These divisions between mind and world have undergirded the entirety of Western thought since Plato. Pragmatic philosophers, then, concern themselves with the problems and felt difficulties we encounter in our concrete lives and are generally suspicious of foundationalist theories of epistemic justification and metaphysical system-building.

Put another way, experience guides our epistemological contact with the world, and no simple one-way modernist epistemology can satiate the overwhelming complexity of experience and its context. The modern empiricists, for instance, held that the justification for a belief is given in perception as sense datum. This foundationalist and oversimplified empiricism is rejected in principle because the objects of the world are not separate from us in experience, but linked to what James calls the “conceivable effects” [James 1998, 29] of the collapse between mind and world. Instead, the objects of the world are wholly related to the conscious experiencer. For this reason, the pragmatist philosopher needs the world. She does not hide from it, or put another more real and invisible world on top of it (e.g. Plato’s *Eidos* or Descartes’s *res cogitans*). She is bound to it, and the theories proposed are always interpretations and classifications rather than appealing to some non-sensory Given in empiricism or some abstract trans-experiential fiction proposed in rationalism. Theories are, then, historically mediated constructions. Theories are constructions out of the content of experience, and they are always open to being revised. In this way, the classical and neopragmatists embrace the complexity of what experience is regardless of their disagreements about its specific epistemological and metaphysical nature. In James, the epistemological nature of experience is his pragmatism, and the metaphysical nature of experience is his radical empiricism.

Third, pragmatism emphasizes an openness to possibility since our access to the world of experience is mediated by a variety of selective interests, intellectual histories, varying linguistic and discursive practices, explorations in those interests, and though impeded access

to the view from nowhere, the universe is an unfolding and dynamic process of growth. I often speculate that the novel universe of growth and potential is regarded as dynamic in precisely the same way that James articulated his stream of consciousness and how he defined experience as “the immediate flux of life which furnishes material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories” [James 2003, 49]. More negatively, we cannot get to the view from nowhere philosophically, but that does not mean we abandon the melioristic role pragmatism plays as a mediator between the extremes our philosophical imaginations often generate in our inquiries. All inquiry is, therefore, *in media res*.

As briefly mentioned already, we cannot transcend the world to some privileged point of access where theory is not ladened. Instead, all theory is historically conditioned and passed down. In fact, the word “tradition” comes from the Latin verb *tradere* meaning “to pass down” to posterity. In this way, the world in pragmatism does not impose itself upon us, nor do we have access to it independently from these conditioned and inherited moments. When describing the world and its objects, it’s up to us how best to describe the world with the tools and theories we have at our disposal already and if they are lacking, then pragmatists modify them by our own design or reject them outright. In the case of James, he rejected the extreme solution of a ready-made universe – what he called famously “the block universe” due to the openness of a universe that can grow and change. For this reason, pragmatic solutions are always more partial, but we self-identifying pragmatists become aware of how possibilities may be enacted, forever linking our theoretical efforts to action. There’s no such thing as a theory unguided by action. Action and practical interest are always guiding the development of thoughts about the world in which such action and practical interest are generated. Indeed, anyone infected with the pretension of German idealism or Husserlian phenomenology prefers philosophical system building and the comfort of concepts to what is concretely experienced. In such formal systems, concepts are substituted wrongly for percepts; theorized solutions become more important than facilitating interaction between human beings and the world those theories describe. For this reason, pragmatists are generally against claiming absolute answers to timeless philosophical questions but are given to tentative contextually-sensitive solutions that are guided by the practical interests that come out of those timeless questions. As James reminds us, in “every genuine metaphysical debate some practical issue, however conjectural and remote, is involved” [James 1998, 52].

Fourth, the integration of action and knowledge reveals a deep concern with the social and political problems that confront us on a daily basis. The pragmatist is centrally occupied with philosophy as a tool to solve practical problems, which means that pragmatists are forever concerned with cultural problems. The contemporary scene of American pragmatists writing on race, gender, feminism, and a host of other socio-political and economic problems cannot be emphasized enough. American pragmatism recovers the central therapeutic role that philosophy played for the Ancient Greeks (and perhaps why the connections between the psychologist and philosophy run so deep in James's writings) (2). Recall that Epictetus states "philosophy is practiced for the health of the soul." For the pragmatists, the role of the intellectual is not a divorced intellectualism, but a biding concern with others and the well-being of community. On a whole, pragmatists tend to favor democracy, community, and individualism, though to be fair various thinkers oftentimes neglect one for the other. A central disagreement between Jamesians and Deweyians could be had about how much individualism should be allowed in relationship to a community and what the relationship between individuals and community are. Given this practical orientation, pragmatists often write in non-academic spaces, and take their cue from both James and Dewey to be public intellectuals.

In summary, I have maintained that a thematic continuity runs through the classical pragmatists, neopragmatists, and contemporary pragmatists. This continuity can be vaguely characterized as an integration of theory and practice, but experience gives theory its content such that action is always guiding the formation of knowledge. Out of this continuity, there exist four implications of this concern. These are: 1) pragmatists are centrally concerned with the human relationship to a process-oriented and evolving conception of nature rather than a static and teleological world; 2) for pragmatists, experience provides the criteria for belief and our beliefs are regarded not as propositions that map onto a separate and fixed reality, but instead their truth emerges out of the habits beliefs generate; 3) pragmatism emphasizes an openness to possibility since our access to the world of experience is mediated by a variety of selective interests, intellectual histories, varying linguistic and discursive practices, explorations in those interests, and though impeded access to the view from nowhere, the universe is an unfolding and dynamic process; and 4) pragmatists are deeply concerned with the

social and political problems that confront us on a daily basis. Hence, philosophy is a tool to engage cultural problems as much as rethinking the basis of older philosophical ones.

2. James's Pragmatism: Settling Metaphysical Disputes and the Analytic-Continental Divide

The second question posed by the Organizing Committee of the "150 Years of Pragmatism" Conference: William James understood pragmatism as "primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes". What positive role, if any, could pragmatists play in "settling" current analytical-continental controversy?

In order to answer this question, we must understand the manner in which James understands the term "metaphysics" given that pragmatism is a method for settling "metaphysical disputes." To understand metaphysics first, I have to analyze what metaphysics means exactly for James's *Psychology: Briefer Course* (1892), *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (1897) and how that understanding develops in his *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907), and the relationship *Pragmatism* has with his *Essays in Radical Empiricism* he was writing and delivering between 1904–1906.

In the second section, I outline how the earlier exploration of metaphysics animates concerns about metaphysics prior to pragmatism being a method for dispute resolution, and what that means for his epistemology.

In the third section, I understand the question being asked to include my assessment about whether or not James's pragmatism can be employed as a method of "settling" the current Analytic-Continental Divide. As such, I will briefly introduce my thoughts from my own biography since my philosophical education was tied to my awareness of this Divide (choosing to receive an Analytic MA and a Continental Ph.D.), why I chose to study James's writings at length, and whether or not such settlement is even desirable in our current philosophical climate.

In the fourth and final section, I offer my conclusion. In Jamesian spirit, my conclusion is if settlement embraces James's thick conception of experience, then the resulting ontological pluralism is the best settlement possible, and this commitment to pluralism requires dissolving the exclusionary practices the Analytic-Continental Divide suggests philosophically.

2.1 ‘Metaphysics’ in James’s Thought

Metaphysics has two senses in James’s philosophical works. First, let’s start with James’s *Briefer Course*. In that work, James makes clear that metaphysics is the set of all assumptions presupposed in order that the science of psychology may proceed. Psychology is a narrower special science whereas by contrast metaphysical puzzles have the purpose of the “attainment of the maximum possible insight into the world as a whole” [James 1985, 395–396]. Let’s call this first version *vision of the whole metaphysics*. Thus, as a developing science, psychologists can largely ignore the underlying metaphysical assumptions. In his Epilogue, however, metaphysics for the psychologist presents themes that will later be explored more in depth during James’s rejection of all dualisms and the last part of his life where metaphysics becomes more nuanced in its second form as a metaphysics of pure experience (3). For James, these are: 1) the psychophysical “relation of consciousness to the brain”; 2) “the [cognitive] relation of states of mind to their ‘objects’”; 3) “the changing character of consciousness”; and 4) that “states of consciousness are themselves are not verifiable facts” [James 1985, 395–400]. As a consequence, he suggests three overall arching metaphysical theses in the first sense: monistic, spiritualistic, and atomistic. Now, I will not go into James’s attention to these categories. Needless to say, James gave attention to metaphysics of those assumptions behind the focus of psychology at a time when psychology is vying for legitimacy as a recognizable science. What comes of James’s efforts is that metaphysics is a conceptual exploration internal to a special and narrow focus even though it’s regarded as the *maximum* “possible insight into the world as a whole.”

With the publication of his *Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (1897), James takes stock of the entire metaphysical tradition as a *vision of the whole*. Specifically in “The Will to Believe” James calls into question the objective evidence necessary to arrive at a final truth and *vision of the whole* in metaphysics. He writes,

For what a contradictory array of opinions have objective evidence and absolute certitude been claimed! The world is rational through and through, – its existence is an ultimate brute fact; there is a personal God, – a personal God is inconceivable; there is an extra-mental physical world immediately known, – the mind can only know its own ideas; a moral imperative exists, – obligation is only the resultant of desires; a permanent spiritual principle is in every one, – there are only shifting states of mind; there is an endless chain of causes, – there

is an absolute first cause; an eternal necessity, – a freedom; a purpose, – no purpose; a primal One, – a primal Many; a universal continuity, – an essential discontinuity in things; an infinity, – no infinity. There is this, – there is that; there is indeed nothing which some one has not thought absolutely true, while his neighbor deemed it absolutely false; and not an absolutist among them seems ever to have considered that the trouble may all the time be essential, and that the intellect, even with truth directly in its grasp, may have no infallible signal to have for knowing whether it be truth or not [James 1897, 16].

In this passage, James looks back on two thousand years of metaphysical speculation and what I am call *vision of the whole metaphysics*. Vision of the whole metaphysics is plagued with inherent intractability. Nowhere else in James's corpus is he so thoroughly skeptical about metaphysics directly, though these themes will resurface again with the same intensity in his *Pragmatism* lectures.

According to James, it never occurs to metaphysicians that the *vision of the whole* cannot be secured. James also reveals that this intractability to think the *vision of the whole* in metaphysics even possible relies on an attitude of objective certitude. The absolute dogmatist thinks that we can have access to a *vision of the whole*. For James, the absolute dogmatist can be idealists or materialists, rationalists or empiricists. In *A Pluralistic Universe*, he rails against idealistic monism as guilty of a vicious intellectualism in much the same manner. For the vicious intellectualist, "truth is universal and single and timeless, a single content or significance, one and whole and complete" [James 1996, 101]. Vicious intellectualism and absolute dogmatism are guilty of the same objective certitude that one cannot have privileged access, a vision of the whole. In these false objective certainties, "the final truth must be something to which there is no imaginable alternative, because it contains all its possible alternatives inside of itself as moments already taken into account of and overcome" [James 1996, 102] (4). However, James's point is that we cannot have a metaphysical theory that accesses reality in the way that elevates conception apart from lived-experience. In fact, all theories come from the ways in which we experience its effects. For this reason, James abandons this objective certitude for what will become his radical empiricism in those essays (5). What matters for James is, then, the pragmatic upshot, "Not where [a belief] comes from but what it leads us to decide" [James 1897, 17].

Second, metaphysics has its second sense in relationship to his radical empiricism. This second sense of metaphysics can be distinguished as the *partial vision of the whole*. Let me explain. James will favor this *partial vision of the whole* as contrasted against the *vision of the whole* conception of metaphysics he first outlined in the early 1890s. To see this, I transition to his radical empiricism.

James had formulated a *partial vision of the whole* metaphysics – what he would call radical empiricism. His *Essays in Radical Empiricism* come from works written between 1904–1906 before he published his *Pragmatism* in 1907. My claim is not one of strict identification between radical empiricism and a *partial vision of the whole metaphysics*. Radical empiricism is one variety of the *partial vision of the whole* metaphysics. I contend that even if radical empiricism were false, which I do not think to be the case, James's claims about the limit of *vision of the whole* metaphysics would still be true, and there would still be need to rethink what a *partial vision of the whole* metaphysics would look like.

When James first mentions “metaphysics” in that collection of essays, he does so in “A World of Pure Experience.” In that essay, his explicit use of “metaphysical” is linked to the fictitious sense of those philosophies that distort the fundamental reality of our relation and experience of the world radical empiricism seeks to rectify. For him, *vision of the whole* metaphysics is “all the metaphysical fictions” that could “pour into our philosophy” [James 2003, 26]. James's statement of his radical empiricism appears just several pages prior to this mentioning of metaphysics. James puts his principle of radical empiricism thusly:

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. *For such a philosophy* [metaphysics, I suggest], *the relations that connect experience must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as “real” as anything else in the system.* Elements may indeed be redistributed, the original placing of things getting corrected, but a real place must be found for every kind of thing experienced, whether term or relation, in the final philosophical [and therefore metaphysical] arrangement [James 2003, 23].

Given close proximity of the two meanings of metaphysics, James intimates the distinction I have drawing out from a brief encounter with

his philosophical thoughts from the 1890s into the 1900s – what we have called his skepticism about the *vision of the whole* metaphysics. This proximity also serves as textual fact for the interpretation I am offering.

He states the principle several times over in several works. James restates the same principle slightly different in his “The Thing and Its Relations,”

Radical empiricism takes conjunctive relations at their face value, holding them to be as real as the terms united by them. The world it represents as a collection, some parts of which are conjunctively and others disjunctively related [James 2003, 56].

For James, the world consists only of relations conditioned as it is by the manner in which it appears. “Taken as it does appear, our universe is to a large extent chaotic. No one single type of connection runs through all the experiences that compose it” [James 2003, 24]. Thus, these relations, as he puts them, hang together, and it’s to our credit that we can explore the various ways in which we discover them hanging together. Since “relation” is his word for experience, we can suggest various ways in which our connections run through the various threads of the world and what can illuminate our experiences from those that cannot [James 2003, 13]. We test them pragmatically. James’s metaphysics of pure experience is, then, a way of discovering some relations whereas we should be humble that we cannot experience all possible ways in which these relations may grow and become, and thus we should embrace a partial vision of the whole before even thinking a vision of the whole is even possible. In his *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909) metaphysics is linked to abused technicalities which defy and ignore that problems are historical and that metaphysicians operate in limits, the very limits of radical empiricism: “the only material we have at our disposal for making a picture of the whole world is supplied by various portions of that world which we have already had experience” [James 1996, 15, and 8]. For this reason, then James supports the fact that our metaphysicians (try as they might) cannot encapsulate the all-form in any proposed philosophical system. We should think of the all-form as another way of expressing the very way the world is in its totality, the *maximum of possible insight into the whole world*, and the *vision of the whole* – all at the same time. “[T]here may never be an all-form at all” [since] “the substance of reality may never get totally collected,

that some of it remains outside the largest combination ever made” [James 1996, 34]. We cannot experience the whole, and so James’s radical empiricism attempts to weigh the purpose of any relations we propose exist and that our experience has confirmed. For James, experience is additive and for each discovery in experience includes possibilities to ever increasing explanatory complexity and relationship with the world. Yet, we should never think that there would ever be a final metaphysical conception for how the world could be experienced or felt (or known for that matter).

Since radical empiricism takes conjunctive relations at face value and our full metaphysical picture is inclusive of all the possibilities and irreducible contents of a person’s experience; conjunctive relations are all modes of actual ways we can experience particular phenomena (6). For James, then, pure experience is “the instant field of the present... in its pure state, plain unqualified actuality, a simple *that*, as yet undifferentiated into thought and thing” [James 2003, 39, 12]. This pure experience consists of feeling and sensations entirely, providing the very medium to which we can assign the place of both thought and thing, but without which we cannot say anything more objectively certain about the content and structure of that which we experience and the world in general [James 2003, 49] (7). For James, we can use the term “felt relations” and conjunctive relations synonymously for this reason. What’s more, we should take felt relations as primary for James’s metaphysics of experience as a whole (and maybe consider it embodying our own hermeneutic position) (8). When we do, James’s interpretation of felt relations as conjunctive relations indicates that our relationship to a dynamic and unfolding universe never granting a vision of the whole. This limitation results in favoring an ontological (existential) pluralism about the openness to multiple possibilities and meanings in both one’s experience and nature at large.

This dynamic and unfolding universe takes a process view of experience. In his words, pure experience is “the immediate flux of life which furnishes all material to our later reflection and conceptual categories” [James 2003, 49]. In this way, the very fact that we can modify and reflect upon the very content of our experience without distinguishing thought and thing, draw out distinctions, intuit and observe phenomena, form beliefs, and imagine solutions to coordinate our activity in life is James’s solution to the pragmatist dilemma outlined earlier. Let me explain. If pragmatism is the sustained

disagreement about how action guides knowledge formation with the attending complexity of context and fallibilism, then radical empiricist metaphysics of experience is James's partial solution to explain the why experience works as it does – the very why and how it works.

Radical empiricism suggests the reasons why James expressed his commitment to pragmatism as a method of solving disputes and more generally why pragmatism was presented as a theory of truth. To understand James, then, we should both understand the radical empiricism and his pragmatism work together, even though he felt that one could still be a pragmatist and reject his metaphysics of experience.

The reason I have reviewed how the term “metaphysics” seems employed by James is that his *Pragmatism* lectures pick up on the fact that metaphysics was the maximum possible insight into the whole world and now the radical empiricism doctrine establishes a liminal sense as to that the maximum possible insight can truly be. More than that, however, pragmatism as a method is the very epistemology of this overall metaphysical insight about how experience functions, and we cannot hope to extricate pragmatism as a method without attention to the radical empiricism that James saw as underlying his own vision. In the end, metaphysical speculation is a poetic expression of existential need rather than purely explanatory scope. In other words, James will favor the *partial vision of the whole*, and the gap between *Essays in Radical Empiricism* and how James arrived his pluralism in *A Pluralistic Universe* is a story we need to fill in. I propose the uncontroversial thesis that James's pragmatism serves as an epistemological basis to support James's radical empiricism. I now turn to his *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*.

NOTES

(1) I am drawing a distinction between contemporary pragmatism and neopragmatism since in some circles I have seen “neopragmatism” to mean an exclusive Rortyian-like influence and contemporary pragmatists often highlight their own affinities through the major figure that influences them such as Peircians, Sellarsians, and Brandomians. Contemporary pragmatism has since come to mean some form of pragmatism through Brandom and Sellars.

(2) James Campbell coins the neologism “psycholopher,” and I think that term expresses this insight brilliantly [Campbell 2017].

(3) David Lamberth locates this rejection of all dualism around 1904 in the original publication of “Does Consciousness Exist” and “A World of Pure Experience” occurring around 1904 whereas James's doctrine of pure

experience is present in nascent forms alongside the development of James's radical empiricism in 1895-1896 [Lamberth 1999, 66, n 13].

(4) Someone might object that vicious intellectualism is the critique of idealistic monism from Hegel, but an important parallel can be made with any absolute dogmatism that thinks metaphysics capable of discerning timeless truth. The absolute dogmatist would hold the same about truth of its propositions as would the Hegelian caricature given here. Thomists and Hegelians all sound the same when it concerns the confidence of their speculation. In fact, for them, speculation ceases to be speculative and is almost always definitive if the effort of the imagination is logically consistent with core animating first principles of their metaphysical commitments.

(5) James will refer to his own radical empiricism in *The Will to Believe Preface*. For this reason, it's more sensible to conclude that James is developing his radical empiricism in the mid-1890s than thinking radical empiricism is the result of his turn to metaphysics in the 1900s.

(6) In my latest book, *Persons and Values in Pragmatic Phenomenology* (Vernon Press, 2018), I read James and Scheler together, and suggest that synthesizing these systems together generates a conception of a pragmatic phenomenology as laying the groundwork for an ethical ontology. I am tempted to take radical empiricism as the way of restoring phenomenology on the proper path to its potential against all transcendental varieties. I am unsure as to whether I accomplished that in my synthesis of James and Scheler together, and am rethinking that radical empiricism is the form phenomenology should take. In this way, it matters little if various scholars disagree about whether or not James should be understood as a phenomenologist, but rather that phenomenology should be understood through his radical empiricism in order to be viable at all.

(7) This latter view I call – following Russell – neutral monism.

(8) In John McDermott's *Introduction* to Harvard Series of the *Works of William James* version of the *Essays in Radical Empiricism* McDermott highlights felt relations as the great unifying force of James's metaphysics. Drawing attention to James's essay "On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology" [January 1884], McDermott states, "James puts his finger on the contention that was to occupy him in a central way for the rest of his life: the fact of felt relations" [McDermott 1976, p. xviii]. In this essay and in my own work, I adopt this same interpretive hypothesis. I am simply pointing it out as an assumption that is shaping my historical treatment of James in this essay.

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To be continued